



Agitating the void: phenomenology and its practical application in drawing

by

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Declaration

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Abstract

Our conscious experience of things is what gives them meaning distinct from the things themselves. *Agitating the Void* takes this philosophical notion, critically interrogating Edmund Husserl's phenomenologic theory of conscious experience, and applies it in new practical ways in the field of drawing. In doing so, this project creates new pathways in the application of descriptive, interpretive and explanatory systems for creative practice.

The project's drawings derive their subject matter from analyzing personal experiences that engage qualities of the void at four different geographic locations. Grounded in Husserl's characterisation of phenomenology, the project's theoretical context enables me to postulate and advance a link between my personal experience – of cognitive and remembered impressions of the void – and its materialisation in drawing. Through adapting and testing phenomenologic theory in practice, subsequently the void, as manifest in drawings, in landscape, in memory and within myself, becomes transformed, viewed emphatically as both an entity and a feeling.

I interrogate a number of artists and theorists who manifest deeply reflective interpretations of their tacit experience of the material world, such as Christopher Tilley's practical application of phenomenology as a method to gain insights into the meaning and purpose of ancient rock formations in Europe, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty's view that the meaning of conscious experience is emphasised by the sensing body as a conduit between the perception of the thinking mind and things as they exist in the world. I explore Gaston Bachelard and Junichiro Tanizaki's phenomenologically poetic perceptions of darkness, and

Alain Badiou and Jacques Derrida's analytic approaches that encapsulate the dichotomy of certainty and uncertainty in the act of drawing.

The creative work of this thesis sheds new light on the void; through intense observation of the striking geological forms and the surface of rocks found at each site; through the ambience of the site as affected by my personal viewpoint; and, fundamentally through the experiential lens of my own mood and temperament. Sensations of being on edge, feeling despair and melancholy, or isolation, emptiness, negation or absence, are channelled to manifest the void through drawing. Central also is the effect of absence and forgetting, and traces of remembered experiences actively recalled in the studio as a phenomenological mechanism in the creative process. Intrinsically, it is in the act of remembering the void, rather than that of the direct experience, that informs the development and resolution of the drawings. The drawings picture the void, where its qualities – as uncertain, equivocal and tenuous – are manifest in the different attributes and qualities of drawn marks, and at times, their erasure and/or re-layering.

Within this, the paradox of the void is revealed – it is empty yet full, it is both form and nothingness, and in a pictorial sense it is both representational and abstract. It is revealed through fluctuating snippets of memory replete with forgetting and absences; and in the tenuous materialisation of internal emotive states. In these circumstances, the void agitates connections between both feeling and material things.

The significance of the research lies in the expansion of inquiry into, and knowledge of, individual or social-cultural relationships and their connection to the physical and

metaphysical world through the application of Husserl's phenomenologic theory. This approach creates a new pathway to gain tacit knowledge and understanding of phenomena, experience and their interpretation and expression through artistic practice.

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Introduction

Agitating the Void critically interrogates phenomenologic theory of conscious experience and applies it as a method to interpret qualities of the void in the practical application for making drawings. The drawings derive their subject matter from analysing personal experiences of the void at four different geographic sites. Qualities of the void are derived and documented from careful observation of the geological rock forms; the spaces and gaps in between them at each site; through the ambience of the site as affected by my personal viewpoint; and, fundamentally through the experiential lens of my own mood and temperament. Crucial to the development of the drawings is that the documented material collected at each site subsequently transforms over time, as it is reflected upon, at a later date, in my studio. Transformations conjure the void in the drawings in the form of mutations, alterations and erasure of subject matter indicative of the effect of memory, as remembering and forgetting, of experience.

The project's aim is to produce a series of drawings that capture metaphysical characteristics of the void revealed whilst experiencing a variety of rock forms. The premise is that intense experiences of these forms, when observed, recorded and reflected upon, transform or erode when experienced as memory. Such transformations characterise the existential nature and fragility of experience and invoke elements of the void.

The intention is to move beyond the pictorial conventions of depicting things in the world, heighten the psychological impact of an image with the purpose of augmenting a deeper

understanding and expression of human's psychological and physiological connections to experiencing the world through drawing.

I am interested in the void because, as a subject, it is ambiguous in definition, and fluctuates in presence and meaning. Similarly, I feel these characteristics when I observe certain types of landscapes and when I'm engaged in the act of drawing. Throughout the exegesis, the terms 'void' and 'void-like' are frequently used and refer to the fluid, ambiguous, unknowable and uncertain qualities of the void as a phenomenon. These terms are unravelled and expanded upon in relation to phenomenological experience as described in the theories of German philosopher Edmund Husserl and others.

The challenges of representing or picturing the void lies in its intangibility; it has neither material qualities nor distinct spatial dimensions. However, a review of literature on the void shows that it can be materialised as the subtle presence of something vacant or absent. These subtleties I engage with as a range of cognitive thinking and are informed by tacit knowledge gained whilst exploring at each site. Important concepts around the materialisation of the void include: identifying empty things with fullness, as presence and absence in relation to remembering and forgetting; and, as loose and expressive forms of mark making to signify internal emotive states. These concepts are described in my drawings with masses of drawn scribbles and hatched lines, and in the picturing of dark yielding space, empty and/or minimal space beside the representational figurative image of rock forms.



Fig. 1. David Edgar, *pathway* (detail), 2010. Charcoal on paper, 75 x 300 cm.

In my pictures, an experience, as a form of memory, is drawn as layers of marks across the surface of the picture plane. To make a drawing I build it up with many other layers of mark making using slightly different processes and techniques each time. Each layer acts as a ‘modification of’ (Husserl 2012, p. 212) the streams of conscious perception of experience, and alters the form of the work through the progressive act of drawing. The process amplifies and extends the characteristics of the memories (of alteration or deterioration) of experience. Further, the drawing occurs in a studio removed from the original place of the experience, causing an additional displacement. Thus, the subject matter and the original experience is further altered, adding to the metaphysical effect of void in the image.

The project expands on these ideas by surveying a broad array of artistic practice. My aim is to evoke a rich platform of enquiry into exploring and synthesising a wide variety of methods and processes of visual mark making in relation to representing relationships between perceived sensations of an experience of place and event with void-like characteristics. Within this, an exchange of multi-sensory experience occurs in the personality of the artworks examined, between the things observed in the world and the way these things are observed.¹

¹ I use the word ‘things’ in reference to Husserl’s definition in *Phenomenology of things*, or objects, as perceived through the senses as they exist in the outside ‘lived world’ (Husserl 2012, p. 33 & 54).

I take these learnings and position them around four of my own intense experiences. Each experience corresponds to a different type of site I visited. Each site has its own unique set of rocky features. Each also has its own type of evocative atmosphere and ambience with a level of intensity which informs the experience, the structure and the processes involved with making drawings. Overall, each experience embodies a consciousness of observation subsequently altered by the void-like qualities of memory. These qualities are speculative, slight, and minimal in recognisable content, which I subtly alter and mutate in response to remembering or forgetting. Void-like qualities are also developed as forms of emptiness with fullness. These qualities include negation, as flat or yielding areas of tone or as loosely drawn open-ended space. Emptiness with fullness is an expression coined by Susan Sontag to consider the way artists broaching the perception of emptiness, or the void, in the world should consider it alongside that of fullness, which marks it off. Further, Sontag explains, to create a sense of emptiness in art, the artist must focus on the fullness of that emptiness to enrich its meaning (Sontag 1978).

I explore Sontag's theme by drawing matter as rock forms, against a fullness of emptiness relative to the spaces between them. The rock forms provide the figurative forms within the drawings. However, these forms also characterise the unknown of the void as they refer to a sense of deep metaphysical time relative to their formation. Whereas, the spaces between them are vacant or with minimal form and are expressed within the drawings through use of solid areas of flat black or by leaving blank space. These intervals or gaps expose the spatial and perceptual conundrums of voids.

I have set out to explore representing qualities of the void as derived from observations made during the experience of four geographic sites. Crucial is an acknowledgement of the influence of the emotive content of each experience as well as displacement and memory, with each representing the abovementioned void-like qualities. These emotional experiences precede and are informative to the subsequent drawings.

First, I observe and record carefully, using sketches, photographs and note-taking. I focus particularly on the shapes of the rock forms and the dark shadowy spaces in between them. For example, when I look down into a sink hole, I note and memorise the concrete elements such as shape, size and in relation to, as John Dewey writes, “all the qualities and values of ... [the] esthetic experience” (Dewey 1980, p. 230), found within the dark shadows and the intrinsic qualities of the surrounding rock. I then record idiosyncrasies of the rock not at first seen, such as the minutiae, or the corners and edges. This knowledge provides information that underlies the drawing that occurs at a later date in my studio. I find John R. Searle’s comments relevant in this regard. He writes of this type of reengagement as:

“Representation comes by way of resemblance” (Searle 2015, p. 225).

Back in my studio, the observations that I made and recorded are reinterpreted in drawing through forms of mark making and tone. Working this way exposes contrasts in the way things are observed and drawn. But before I make a mark, other factors are also observed. I acknowledge that a period of time has elapsed from when I had observed the rock forms to when I review the experience in my studio. The direct experience fades and deteriorates in intensity, and what remains is an essence of what occurred *in situ* via the recordings I made. To further my knowledge of the site and to inform my drawings, I consult the writing that I

had made when *in situ*. I consider how the existential thoughts and feelings recorded in the writing alter and enrich elements of the recorded information.

These factors influence the drawing and mark making yet to unfold. Dewey writes of this in reference to the act of representation, in the sense of expression, as a means to cover “all the qualities and values of any possible esthetic experience” (Dewey 1980, p. 230), where the artist will “... resee the object in terms of lines, colours, light, space ...” and its “relations that form a pictorial whole...” (Dewey 1980, p. 93). In my drawings, it is the arrangement of lines, tones and spaces that allude to the qualities of experiencing the void. An essence of the rock forms I observe, my mood and temperament, the influence of memory, and the marks that I make to represent them further articulate these qualities of the void, as they interpenetrate and fuse through drawing.

Geoffrey Bailey writes of drawing representation as a becoming of the relational structure of an artist’s vision of the world. The artist fashions his drawing from his own unique vision. This is reached via careful observation of the subject matter being drawn and the context to which it is placed. Of importance is the relationship to and application of the medium to enhance the subject matter and context. With these many levels of engagement feeding into the drawing, the process is arduous, and as Bailey notes calls “for prolonged and concentrated guided vision” (Bailey 1982, p. 42). The involved process of drawing is made up of many different glances of the thing being drawn manifest from the “residue of many visions always from memory” (Bailey 1982, p. 40) with each of these continually changing as the drawing process progresses. Philip Rawson acknowledges that a drawing conveys

meaning "... not by a general similarity of surface but by a structure of symbolic elements which are formulated as method" (Rawson 1969, p. 24).

As I start to draw, building-up marks, form and tone, my sense experience and memories of the rock forms deteriorate and fade further as the act of drawing continues. What is crucial is that I create various types of forms from marks as illusions of three-dimensional form.²

However, these forms do not always conform to the observed qualities of the rock forms as recorded *in situ*, rather they interrelate with other ambiguous spatial forms and marks made relative to the qualities of void that I am seeking to represent.

The rock forms in my images are viewed separately from the process (the marks made) that go into making a picture. Dewey writes of this as the "individual contribution" (Dewey 1980, p. 85) of the artist, which makes the picturing of the rock forms something new. Things, that is the rock forms that I draw, are not merely represented, rather, they picture the presentation of

"a material passed through the alembic of personal experience. They have no precedents in existence or in universal being. But, nevertheless, their material came from the public world and so has qualities in common with the material of other experiences, while the product awakens in other person's new perceptions of the meanings of the common world" (Dewey 1980, p. 86).

² This is one of the fundamental problems an artist has to deal with when drawing objects as observed from within the world – the ability to reinterpret the three-dimensional world as one dimensional marks into a two-dimensional illusion. Drawing, in this instance, presents itself as an artificiality of the world where tensions in pictorial illusion lurk. For the artist, this is a persistent issue at the time of making a drawing. Dewey writes, this "demands abstraction from the usual conditions which they exist" (Dewey 1980, p. 98). An abstraction that modifies each drawing and gives it added meaning.

To add to the uniqueness of the drawing, Patrick Maynard writes, "... representations are things with the function of mandating that we imagine in certain ways, mainly depending on their relevant properties" (Maynard 2005, p. 88). The relevant properties, or forms or qualities of the void represented in my drawings include:

- the dark shadowy gaps between the rock forms, made with charcoal soft pastel sticks, and representative of the uncertainty of the darkness of the interior shadowy realm around the rock forms that cannot be seen. These are suggested as ambiguous spatial concerns manifest as areas of dark in my pictures.
- as unknowable, represented in the broader gaps of blank underworked spaces on the margins of the picture plane and in the erasure/erosion of marks that leaves traces and fragments of previously made marks, in many of the drawings. These refer to the fragile act of remembering and forgetting experiences, as they subtly alter or deteriorate over time. A memory, like drawing, therefore creates its own fragile condition of the representation of experience.
- as registered in the ambiguous picturing of loose speculative and repetitive scribbly forms, made with charcoal soft pastel sticks and a range of soft, medium and hard charcoal pencils, and as mutations formed in the act of mark making made by the layering and/or erasing of redrawn sketches.

The marks I make respond to my own unique emotive moods and temperaments as recorded in my diary, and when remembering the experiences as they subtly alter over time. These marks are fragile in representative qualities as they either counteract with other marks to reveal marks existing independently from the rest of the picture, or as they interact with other marks to create the illusion of a rock form. The loosely drawn marks

inform the presence of the rocks in the pictures. But they also suggest a peeling away of the representational qualities of the rock formations, like the peeling away of memories over time. Avis Newman writes, "Only during the process of marking is a cohesion found, a somewhat precarious frame constructed, almost as the byproduct of the articulation of marking thoughts, which by definition are open-ended in a state of flux, and suggestive of a perpetual potentiality" (Tate Gallery. et al. 2003, p. 169).

Essentially, the marks I make hover in a state of flux between the representation of something, a rock form, and the representation of a mark itself. These marks depict subjective and emotive states as they combine with the objectively observed and realistically drawn representation of rocks. However, both forms of mark making, although perceived differently, make up the experience that is recognised in the drawing. They create a new type of experience that incorporates the subtle, ambiguous and uncertain qualities of the void. The intention is to heighten the psychological impact and descriptive and interpretative form of the void in an image.

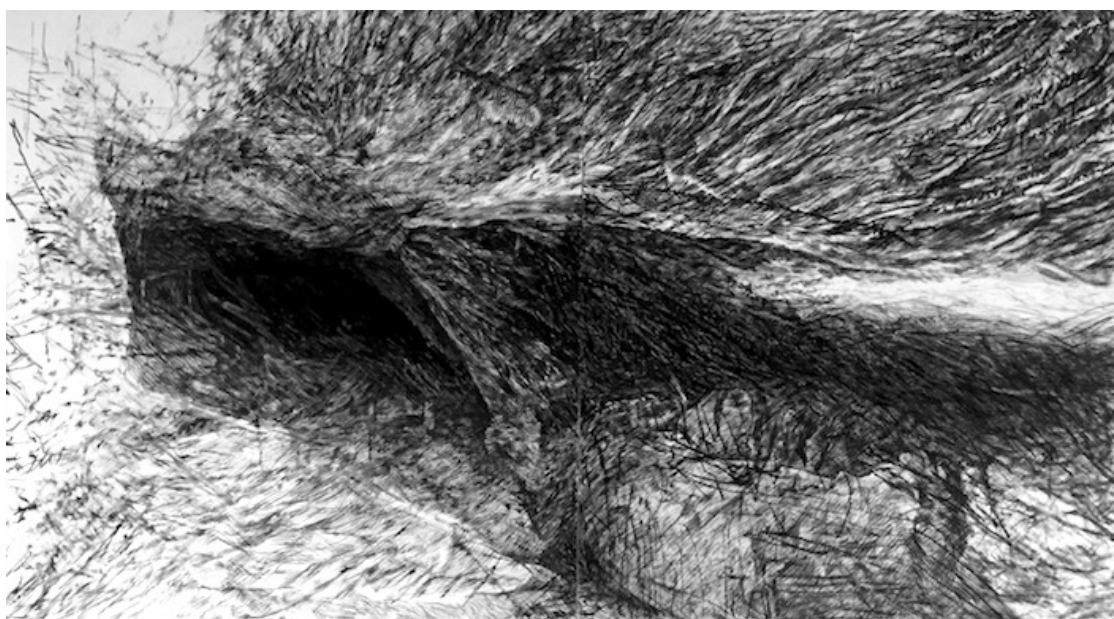


Fig. 2. David Edgar, *unwilling*, 2018. Charcoal on 2 sheets of paper, 145 x 253 cm.

As I commenced this project, I reflected on much earlier encounters that I had had to particular places. These specific places invoked intense experiences where the presence of mystery, the unknown and the distinct feeling of being on edge were present. These experiences, had left strong palpable memories, with each of them disturbing in different ways my sense perception in relation to being consumed by darkness. The places include; a year-long period working as a Structural Engineers' Assistant inspecting coal mine structures deep underground via long vertical shafts in the rock or horizontally into the side of the mountain; and, periods exploring coastal and inland underground caves. In these instances, I recall the feeling of being utterly consumed by the rock of the earth. With the caves, I remember how the entrance would draw me in with a feeling of being seduced by its dark, seemingly infinite receding depths. At times, I would venture so deep in that when my torch was switched off there was only the nothingness of an all-consuming blackness that remained. The coal mines produced a different 'blackness'. At the end of each day I would be completely covered in black coal dust from head to toe. The fine dust would leech into every pore of my skin and be ingested into just about every orifice of my body. For days following periods of working in a mine I would be regurgitating the dust out from my body. I was literally blackened throughout. When I think about these experiences today, I wonder if this was the start of a transformation within me in regards to landscape, the use of charcoal, and the beginning of a deeper morphological engagement with geology that this project aims to interrogate in more detail.

The consequence of this reflection has led me to study four specific sites that provide all of the source material used in the drawings for this project. Each site is characterised by its isolated, remote or unique rock formations. The four sites are: an isolated island and a dark

dank basement both in Tasmania; an area of steep rocky-mountains in southern France and the high-altitude desert of Arizona in the United States of America.

My experiences of the basement and Arizona were recorded whilst being *in situ* and thereafter explored in memory, whereas my experiences on the island and in France are examined through memory only.

The first site, Tasman Island, is located off the most south-easterly point of Tasmania. I commenced this project with the island because it was an opportunity to expand upon knowledge and personal experience that I gained through more than a decade of return visits. I have not physically been back to the island in two and half years prior to commencing this project; I have extended my knowledge of it through memories. Thus, the drawings, and my perceptions of Tasman Island, are interpreted through both remembering and forgetting.



Fig. 3. David Edgar, *Cape Raoul and Tasman Island*, 2012. Digital image.

My memories of the island recall the intense past experiences I had when I went there. These include recalling the hazardous perimeter of the island with its spectacular tall vertical rock forms and the dark fissures between them. What is also clearly apparent is remembering the feelings that the island provoked of isolation, solitude and displacement from the rest of the world. While I can no longer recall the nuances of the island, its essence has seeped deep into my psyche.

The second site in Tasmania is an old basement, with walls made of roughly hewn rock, located in the Bond Store in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. In contrast to working from memories of an island, I developed a series of pictures responding directly to the essence of the conscious experience of being within the site. Working on site embedded me within place, providing a more intensive focus on the rocky interior and my experience of it.



Fig. 4. David Edgar, *Bond Store basement*, 2017. Digital image.

The mood of the dark dank space triggered associations of melancholy within me, tinged with depression, loss and nostalgia. The recording and grasping of the experience felt richer than those based on memory. I perceived the site as multiple unravelling streams of conscious experience with specific forms of associations of the void influencing the process.

The third site focuses on a brief yet intense physiological and psychological experience lasting less than an hour that occurred in the rocky mountainous Alpes Maritimes region in southern France. The experience combines both an acute awareness of observing the world in combination with the memory of it – seeing the physical elements of rock in conjunction with feeling my emotions at the time, later recalled in memory. At the time, the temperament of that day was of an unsettling tension and trepidation. When I commenced working with the site over a year later I was conscious of the impact of both remembering and forgetting aspects of what had occurred, even though much of the intensity of elements of the experience was still evident. This led to a speculative period of practice-led inquiry into various forms of dynamic and energetic mark making in response to memories of place.



Fig. 5. David Edgar, *Gorge du Cians, France*, 2014. Digital image

The fourth and final series of work is derived from a four-week arts residency in the iron-rich mountains of the high-altitude desert of central Arizona. The opportunity substantiated the previous three explorations, in particular, one intense experience that occurred while I was there. One day I observed a palpable combination of the presence of rock forms with an overwhelming emotional charge of euphoria and oneiric affection. The drawings that resulted from the residency build on many of the key attributes from earlier drawings. Produced in my studio, the Arizona drawings exhibit the most rigorously observed and recorded experience of the project and thus developed the most complicated and involved processes and methods of drawing.



Fig. 6. David Edgar, *Cathedral Rock*, 2016. Digital image.

The method I use to explore, reveal and link the void with the rock forms, emotive and atmospheric states and memory is through phenomenologic inquiry. Phenomenology is the study of the essential nature of the conscious experience. My study of it is contextualised through reading works of phenomenology in relation to experience and memory by German philosopher Edmund Husserl. Crucial to Husserl's phenomenology is that it articulates an essence of experience as a method for observing, objectifying, reflecting and enriching, through faithful and rigorous recording.

Phenomenology has been applied within the visual arts as a theoretical philosophy as exemplified by Maurice Merleau-Ponty's essay titled *Cézanne's Doubt*, (1945). In this he analyses Paul Cézanne's final years as a painter through a phenomenological approach to the artist's examination of the world (Smith & Johnson 1993). And in recent decades, there has been a steady increase in the application of phenomenology as a working methodology for descriptive observation, interpretation and art-making that has resulted in various research outcomes.³

For this inquiry, I build on the phenomenological writings of Husserl, and others, by using their theories of phenomenology as a method to advance my own knowledge when observing, recording and interpreting the content of my own streams of intentional conscious experiences of the world. These are inherently personal and existential as the observations I make reflect the emotive content of each experience. The experiences also concern memory and imagination. This approach distinguishes this inquiry from others that I have encountered.

However, with this project, I predominantly build on the phenomenological writings of Husserl, whilst also referring to other writers from time to time, by using their theories of phenomenology as a method to advance my own knowledge when observing, recording and interpreting the content of my own streams of intentional conscious experiences of the world. These are inherently personal and existential as the observations I make reflect the

³ For example, the Drawing Research Network's on-line journal 'Tracey' has a range of academic essays on the subject.

emotive content of each experience. The experiences also concern memory and imagination.

I use phenomenology to compose experiences of the world with intentional thoughts through sense perception. This occurs by my being and moving through the world and remembering it. I re-analyse experience by writing, photographing and sketching it before finally making a drawing of it sometime later. The first phase involved is fieldwork, as experiential understanding, followed by re-evaluation and re-contextualising as a way in which to provoke the memory through drawing. It is, in itself, an act of transformation, of observing, imagining and proposing – a combination of my mind and my body sensing things as they are formed in the world.

I use the phenomenologic method to reveal and link the physical rock formations, voids, and emotive and atmospheric states. I articulate an essence of experience of the void when observing the physical things (rocks) combined with my temperament at the time of experiencing (moods and emotions). The process involves presence and absence in remembering and forgetting as well as displacement. An experience moves from observations in the world to reflection and re-evaluation many times over while in my studio preparing to make drawings. Gaps occur through this process, such as experiences that may be forgotten over time, as well as the physical gap or dislocation from the source site. These gaps conjure qualities of the void, like a missing memory. The drawing process enables an engagement with these gaps. A mark made is a trace of a remembered conscious moment, its erasure, an absence. Like experience, the mark making unravels as a stream of consciousness to conflate experience. Phenomenology, memory, and drawing thus conflate

layers of experience into a whole as a way to gain deeper knowledge and understanding of my tacit experiences in the world.

I contribute to the use of phenomenology as a science that studies the nature of being by providing insights into methods for manifesting qualities of the void visually with drawing.

The void is located in the relationship of elements of experience in the observation of things, moods, and atmospheres. These are developed into forms of drawing representative of my void-like observations of the world. Whereas Husserl's analysis of the effect of experience on memory was crucial for conceiving the void as deteriorated and erased forms in the drawings.

The project primarily examines concepts of the void that occur within the thinking mind. In particular, I am interested in how the void is manifest visually by re-focusing the way I observe my experience of things in the world. Here the void acts as the presence of something vacant or absent. The drawings mediate between being (rocks) and emptiness (space), as inner (self) and outer (rocks), and as palpable corporeal forms of energy (Morley 2010). These ideas have roots in eastern perspectives of the void, such as in the practices of Buddhism, Hinduism and Taoism (Levy 2006). Whilst elements of these belief systems exist in relation to my work, such as the meditative, spiritual and esoteric qualities of the void, and are possible avenues for further analysis (see Levy 2006) they are not the primary focus of this thesis. I engage with ambiguous notions of void as form and subject through the 'Western' existential experience.

Further, I have mostly avoided analysing scientific investigations of the void, often discussed in scientific arenas such as astronomy or physics. Science does however attempt to question what makes a void, and it is here that I have engaged the theory of phenomenology to assist my inquiry. Even though an analysis of eastern and scientific qualities of the void may deepen the scope of the investigation, I have, for the most part, left them aside. Rather the focus is on the drawing investigation of mark making to provoke subtleties of fullness in empty things as an attempt to 'visualise' qualities of the void.

The notion of being affected by the relationship between thoughts and the perception of the physical and material qualities of the rock forms I observed is an important concept of the project. The types of sites that I have studied produce feelings of an inner immensity – where small things in the world conjure a sense of grandness (Bachelard 1988). While it is important to acknowledge characteristics of the sublime in response to mental states of experiencing these rocky sites, I have purposely focussed on the void and not interrogated the sublime in depth. The void in this way engages a symbiotic dialogue between my thinking self and the material elements of a site as a quiet/lonely and gentle/benign subject, one that is subtle, intimate, dark and brooding, as well as mysterious, tenuous and fragile in content.

Successful drawings captured characteristics of the void and developed relationships between the embodied perception of an object (rock forms), the alteration and mutation of experience of that object as effected by memory, and mark making as an abstract entity. The outcome are drawings that embody both the physical and metaphysical, where paradoxical qualities of the void are invoked, as uncertain, fragile and equivocal.

In scoping the project, a number of criticisms of the Kantian notion of sublime⁴ are relevant to the study I have pursued. James Elkins suggests the sublime is shaped by the infinite mind, which I consider as having characteristics of the void. But he also acknowledges the problem of the sublime as a contemporary concept because of its association with a romantic historical past, with roots in religion and transcendence in particular. He suggests these are outdated modes and rather than using the term sublime, he proposes we should instead think of our own synonyms to better and more directly describe it (Elkins 2009). My approach is thus to examine feelings and impressions of the void that are triggered when observing gaps and ruptures in the world. These respond to ruptures in the earth or built environment rather than the qualities of massiveness or great torrential force. As mentioned above, the qualities that put me on edge, such as vacuous-ness, isolation and solitude, euphoria tinged with regard, melancholy and loneliness have also been examined. These moods and emotions are indeed resonant with the sublime but I have explored them in response to the many layered characteristics perceived as emotive states and in the deterioration of experience in memory to produce a more uncertain, equivocal and psychologically fragile approach.

An additional criticism of the sublime, as explored by Emily Brady, suggests that interpreting the experience of the sublime in visual art is problematic. And there is no doubt that these qualities do impact on my study. I do not attempt to replicate my experience as it occurred, even though the subject is mostly drawn with verisimilitude. My attempt is to combine

⁴ Emily Brady notes the Kantian sublime is an aesthetics of fear and pleasure perceived inside of the self/mind when confronted by the multi-sensory and forceful character of first-hand engagement with the feelings of: “vastness (the starry sky, the great deserts, the ocean), massiveness (towering mountains and cliffs), immense magnitude and great force (massive waterfalls, raging seas, torrents, lightning, thunder, exploding volcanoes, hurricanes, earthquakes), threatening qualities (deep ravines, deep oceans, stormy skies, deeply shadowed wastelands)” (Brady 2013, p. 80).

various facets of mutated, altered and eroded experience into the artworks. Thus, the scale of the sublime, as considered by Brady as formless and unbounded in character, as well as the wild visceral qualities as they unravel over time of an experience of being in the world, do indeed inform limitations of the portrayal of the sublime in art (Brady 2013) and the work I made for this project.

As mentioned earlier, I have primarily based my phenomenologic study on Husserl's writings. I have, however, also implemented a pragmatic approach to phenomenology, one rarely used by Husserl in his writing but similar to that used by British archaeologist Christopher Tilley. Tilley uses strands of Husserl's phenomenologic method to investigate his experience of walking through Neolithic stone structures in Europe. Walking amongst the structures, and taking notes about his experience, Tilley then imagines how the ancient people may have lived and what these stones might have been used for. Tilley's main theoretical underpinning of phenomenology is in the writings of Merleau-Ponty's mind and body relationship to conscious experiencing, and Martin Heidegger's notion of getting to 'know' a place through the deep engagement of 'being-there' (Heidegger 1962, p. 27). Tilley particularly explores Merleau-Ponty's view that the meaning of conscious experience is emphasised by the sensing body as a conduit between the perception of the thinking mind and things as they exist in the world. For Tilley, the movements of his body amongst the stone structures underpin his phenomenological inquiry.

In my analysis, I examine the relationships between my mind and the site with my body as an influencing factor. Whereas in my writing on drawing, I examine a much closer relationship of mark making to the mind and body. Both of these occurrences are where

Merleau-Ponty's views on phenomenology are important. But for the most part, my phenomenologic inquiry responds to Husserl's writing.⁵ I do this because a major component of my thought process is towards my mental aptitude observing specific things in conscious experience. Although, I do not deny the importance of Merleau-Ponty's contribution, my aim is to attain an understanding of psychological impressions of the void, and the effect these have on my relationship to site and drawing. Husserl's insights offer a more practical and workable framework to the project.

As previously mentioned, my approach to observing rock forms explores phenomenology as a method for articulating details of the conscious experience. The impact of this affects the decision process when making drawings. In recent decades, phenomenology, as an approach to drawing research has gained traction. In my readings, I found the following three studies to have relevance to the project's aims and approach – Dr Rosemary Montgomery-Whicher's 1997 PhD study of the significance of drawing from observation examined through existential dimensions of space, time, relation and the body (Montgomery-Whicher 1997); Dr Deborah Harty's 2012 study observing the relationship between her thoughts and bodily actions whilst in the process of drawing repetitively (Harty 2012); and, Dr Alex Ashton's 2014 PhD study into the inter-relations of the conscious experience of her body and mind to landscape and place and its embodied relationship to drawing (Ashton 2014). These artist researchers engage a range of phenomenological sources, but crucial to each is Heidegger's notion of 'being', and Merleau-Ponty's inquiry of the experiential body. My approach engages 'being' within each site and the body's

⁵ Husserl does refer to the body in his writing, but it was Merleau-Ponty, who following reading Husserl, put forward the view of the primary dominant position of the body in the act of perceiving conscious experience.

involvement in drawing but I do not analyse my experience of drawing when I am in the act of drawing. My theoretical analysis of drawing does, however, consider the act of an intentional connection between mind and body, the drawing medium, drawing surface and studio. In difference to Harty and Ashton, but with a similar approach to Montgomery-Whicher, I use phenomenology during the first stage of analysis, of my being at a site. My drawings explore a number of threads within experience but I do not use phenomenology to examine my experience of making the drawing or the mark making process.

Further, in defining the scope of drawing within this project, I have consciously decided to work only with tonal variations of black and white, and primarily in one medium, that of charcoal. This limits the scope for embedding other forms of psychological qualities, such as in the fields of colour theory, colour psychology and colour therapy. As an example, choosing to work solely with tonal variations of black and white has allowed for a deeper and more concentrated analysis around the notion of darkness and light and their relationship to the void.



The research produced an exhibition of charcoal drawings that embody the void as both a physical and metaphysical entity. The drawings picture the void as found within geological formations, and from recalled personal experience, from the four sites studied. The metaphysical is manifest in the pictorial space of the pictures registering both as presences and absences of the void as ambiguous space, deep time and displacement. The emotive mood and temperament of the experiences are embodied in the loose and speculative processes of mark making and in the ambiguous pictorial spaces of the pictures. The

drawings as a consequence simultaneously function as figurative and abstract. The former relates to site, the latter to subjective and emotive factors. Within this, qualities of the void – as uncertain, equivocal and tenuous – are invoked. The impact of this, in the drawings, is to heighten the psychological qualities of an image with the purpose of augmenting a deeper understanding and expression of drawing and the world in which I exist.

The significance of this PhD research thesis lies in the expansion of inquiry into, and knowledge of, individual or social-cultural relationships and their connection to the physical and metaphysical world through the application of Husserl's phenomenologic theory. This approach creates a new pathway to gain tacit knowledge and understanding of phenomena, experience and their interpretation and expression through artistic practice.

Agitating the Void develops drawing as a deeper and richer learning platform and method with regard to how one perceives, describes and interprets things in the world. As such, the project adapts drawing as a means to conflate layers of experience and memory into a whole. I recognise too, that during the act of drawing deeper layers of information pertaining to my knowledge of an experience are embedded into my mind as each mark is made.



The exegesis is divided into three parts. The first part, Chapter One, sets out the general theoretical context and considers the significance, relationships and associations generated by: using embodied forms of knowledge associated with phenomenologic approaches to observing and recording conscious experience and memories, and its effect on the four

sites; the void, as an ambiguous entity identified in form and as a subject for observing and recording experiences at the four sites, inclusive of its erosive correlation to the conditions of memory; and, drawing as an expressive, immediate dialogue between oneself and the world used to visualise, through variations in marks, tone and pictorial space, embodied relationships of phenomenologic impressions of the void.

Chapter One provides the theoretical basis for Chapter Two, which concentrates on a range of artistic contextual sources from the perspective of uncovering types of dynamic pictorial spaces, figure and ground disruptions, and expressive mark making in the visual representations of things. The artists I explore include historic reference to the works of: Casper David Friedrich, Paul Cézanne, Francesco Goya, Käthe Kollwitz and Gustave Courbet and examining contemporaries such as Michael Heizer, Susan Turoct, Ian McKeever, John Virtue, Miha Štrukelj, Frank Auerbach, Richard Serra and Anish Kapoor.

I examine how each artist represents their own personal response to elements of the places or events they experience. Whilst the void is not always central to the artists' work, I have illuminated ways to interpret their marks and pictorial spaces to align with it, as appropriate within the parameters of the project.

In addition, a deeper exploration of pictorial space, as spatial disunity, is developed alongside a study of the filmic tropes of Italian Michelangelo Antonioni. I have analysed, in particular, the way his films explore alternative spatial registers, as he grapples with visualising notions of implied existential psychology. Antonioni employs void-like features within landscape as metaphoric characterisation of narrative and the inner emotions of his

subjects to heighten narrative and visual impact in the form of his films.

Chapter Three concerns the pictorial methodologies and strategies, and techniques and media used to develop the studio-based investigation. This chapter addresses the governing methodologies and strategies in relation to the research aims and objectives and to the theoretical sphere in response to the four sites. Each site was chosen for the specific qualities and features of their rock forms but also because they offered fruitful paths for investigation into the challenges of picturing the void. Included is discussion of site as: memory (as remembering and forgetting); and emotion (observing intense emotive states) as engaging with perceived sensations of mood and atmosphere in response to the rock forms at each site. Combined, these qualities affect content, pictorial space and mark making processes when transformed into drawing, forging meaningful links between mind, body and site. I will discuss criteria for the selection of imagery for drawing – source image capture, sketching, photography, notes and writing; the use of source material, collage and computer manipulation, scale, perspective, and viewpoint, and the consistent use of charcoal and paper across the project.

Chapter 1: Phenomenology, void and drawing

The aim of this chapter is to expand on three key theoretical concepts on which the project is based and present an overview of their relationships. The first concept considers embodied forms of knowledge relative to conscious experience, memory and imagination within the field of Phenomenology as developed by German thinker Edmund Husserl.

Phenomenology articulates sense perception as the essence of experience as a method for observing, objectifying, reflecting and enriching, through faithful and rigorous recording. I build on Husserl's phenomenologic method to inform detail in the content of my drawings around the experience of observing rock forms at four geographic sites. Integral also to Husserl's phenomenologic method is that alterations of experience are entwined by memory – when remembered or forgotten as types of presences and absences. These alterations, he explains, creates gaps and modifications in perception. I adapt this from Husserl to conjure the void, which influences unique ways I perceive each subsequent site.

Introducing and developing a workable definition of the concept of void commences in section two of this chapter. I explore the void as the central overarching theme of how I experience rock forms. Initially, I examine the void as a dialogue with the world, as fluctuating, content-less and immaterial, incorporating emptiness, nothingness and displacement, but my primary concern is agitating the void into life, by provoking it as subtleties in visual form. An example, is expressed by Mark Levy's notion of the void as it occurs in the space between two objects, or as dark or blank spaces in an artwork, or as activating as an 'energy field' (Levy 2006, p. 2). Within these voids, I consider vacant and in between spaces and the minutiae in and around the rock forms observed. The expression of

which concerns the deterioration of forms, as a range of ambiguous and abstract spaces, the portrayal of presence and absence, and elements of emptiness with fullness.

Thirdly, I analyse the practice of drawing as an exploratory, immediate, and intimate embodied form of mark making that I use to visualise phenomenologic observations of the void. I explore processes for developing dialogues between mark maker and the expressive and energetic drawing of things as they are observed in nature. Important to this is identifying a link between drawing and the essence of a thing experienced where the conscious perception of a thing can be considered in two ways. Firstly, as a real thing, and second, as an impression of that real thing as poetically manufactured by drawing. From this, an understanding of drawing emerges as an enigmatic yet dynamic relationship between marks made and the ideas and things being drawn. The relationship involves the thinking mind, body, hand, medium, surface and studio with the process and outcome developing in flux. Within this flux there is intensity and fragility as well as gaps where ideas relating to phenomenology, void, memory, emotion and the senses combine.

To conclude section three, I review experimental ways these ideas have been envisioned in drawing by others and refer to statements made by Deanna Petherbridge, John Willat and John Ruskin. Each of these writers/artists develop personalised, playful and investigative processes of mark making to visually communicate their observations of the world. I take their exploratory and speculative drawing processes and adapt them into my own personalised approach to drawing. Identifying with the uncertain and equivocal attributes of the void.

1.1: Phenomenology

"I am present to myself continually as someone who perceives, represents, thinks, feels, desires, and so forth; and for the most part herein I find myself related in present experience to the fact-world which is constantly about me." (Husserl 2012, p. 54)

For many years, I have looked at various types of things in the world and drawn them. Over time, my concentration in this manner has sharpened as has my response to these things through drawing. Each new series of drawings reveals a new thing of interest for me to discover and learn. From this, new moments⁶ in the experience of things emerge. For example, following a period of drawing broad mountainous landscapes, I found myself then seeking information about the smaller elements, such as individual rocks, that group and grow forming the larger ones, the mountains.

The way I perceive the world is integrally tied to my experience of observing it. Edward Casey writes of the experience of visually observing a new wild place for the first time and for him being immediately struck by its "sensuous surface" (Casey 1993, p. 204). When I examine a rocky outcrop in a part of the world I have never seen before, I am struck by the richness of the 'sensuous surfaces' in front of me. I observe the undulating forms, what occurs around, on top of and next to each form, and I analyse its qualities of shape, weight, colour, tone and texture.

⁶ Edward Casey, in *Getting Back to Place*, writes of reflecting on the essential elements of a landscape as being considered as 'moments' of experience. This is an excellent term to use as a visual artist who explores and examines experiences, whereby the distillation of experience is made into a static visual artwork (Casey 1993, p. 204).

As I look, I am simultaneously influenced by other perceptions; my history of observing rocks and the social and cultural factors that include “perceptual habits, belief systems, styles of living, and traditions of behavior and judgment” (Berleant 1992, p. 18). These have been acquired over my lifetime and indicate that observations are also inherently existential and psychological. I thus perceive rock forms as a fusion of my psychological disposition with my awareness of things in the consciousness of the immediate moment.

Over the years, I have found that the most intense experiences and memories I have had are emphasized by emotive states.⁷ Some of these memories are characterised by emptiness with being alone in an open space, or melancholy and anxiety when faced with adversity or darkness. The void is the undetermined in the combination of physical things and emotive states in my experiences. I have found this



Fig. 7. David Edgar, *Rock surfaces and crevices on Tasman Island*, 2010. Digital image.

being triggered when observing the in between spaces of rock formations – the negative or

⁷ When confronted by an intense experience the amygdala part of the brain awakens commandeering other parts of the brain to attend to the situation at hand. These parts of the brain are where memories are laid down in explicit detail. Thus, when intense experiences/memories are embedded into the brain they are laid down in more detail. When I recall an experience like this, it appears to have greater clarity, and I feel like I have slowed down what I think I have experienced even though that isn't the case. David Eagleman writes, “conscious awareness is nothing but lots of fast memory querying: our brains are always asking “What just happened? What just happened?” Thus, conscious experience is really just immediate memory” (Eagleman 2015, pp. 72-73).

dark spaces. These undetermined spaces provoke in me a sense of the periphery and uncertainty of the world, triggering metaphysical sensations of mystery and the unknown. When I observe at a site, I am seeking out these things with the intention to combine sight and physiological effects into drawings.

An example of this I experienced whilst I was in the rocky, mountainous landscape of the Gorge du Cians in the Alpes Maritimes region, Provence-Alpes-Cote d'Azur, in France shortly after commencing the project. It was an intense, emotionally-charged experience; exciting and uncertain and yet pivotal in being able to better understand connections between consciously experiencing the physical matter of a place in tandem with my mood and temperament. I was in France visiting my brother who lives in the region. The day after I arrived we went for a drive, up into the Alps, as he wanted to show me a distinctive rocky section of the mountains that he felt I would be interested in exploring.

I was quite nervous making this trip over to the other side of the world to be with my brother. What brought on these nerves, was that this was the first time I had visited him on his home ground. He had been put up for adoption by our mother, in the UK, before I was born and, prior to this point, I had spent over 5 and a half years searching for him. There was a palpable psychological tension and trepidation within us both, and I think this trip into the mountains was a way to break down some of the nerves.

We made our way through the coastal city of Nice before the road went inland, slowly winding its way higher up into the mountains. On either side of the road, steep cliffs rose and fell. Many hours later, we stopped driving and went for a walk at a section of the

mountain where the rock distinctly changed colour from light umber to deep purple. The walk couldn't have been any longer than 30 or 40 minutes. It took us through naturally occurring and man-made pathways and underneath numerous tunnels hewn into the mountain rock. All the while we were flanked by various layered, angular and undulating rock forms, some sharply linear, others round and bulbous. The rock rose sharply at times blocking light from the sun. Yet around the next corner the sun would bounce off one mountainside rock-face only for another to remain in shadow. The contrast of tone and the striking rock formations made for sharp contrasting intensities of form.

The perception I took home with me of the short experience was nervous energy, unfamiliar tension and trepidation. The potency of the rocks seemed to reflect the potency of the social situation of being with my brother. I was on edge psychologically; the road leading in was on an edge, and the form of the gorge evidenced by the sharp linear fractures, faults, layers and erosion, fused with my emotional temperament.



Fig. 8. David Edgar, *Gorge du Cians*, 2014. Digital image.

I realised the sensations felt during this

experience were akin with similar qualities perceived when viewing certain types of art. For

instance, Michael Heizer's *Levitated Mass*⁸ sculpture produces in me a tension brought on by the material qualities of a rock combined with a sense of feeling unease. Although I have only seen this sculpture in photographic images the impression I am left with is a combination of the material presence of weight, gravity, scale and the surface texture of rock interacting with the negative space around it.



Fig. 9. Michael Heizer, *Levitated Mass*, 2012. Diorite granite and concrete, 106.7 × 1389.8 × 66 cm. Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), image by Carol H. Highsmith.

My perception of it agitates the presence of myself in the now, whilst sparking my imagination into thinking about the deep geologic time of the rock Heizer used, as well as an infinite sense of time in the negative space of the work. It is evocative and yet simple. I can

⁸ *Levitated Mass* consists of a 450-foot roof-less concrete passageway dug down into the earth. The passageway is open at either end allowing people to walk down into it and out the other side. Dipping downwards from both ends into the centre (its lowest point) is where, above the passageway, Heizer has placed an enormous 340-ton boulder. The boulder straddles the space above sitting on two small shelves on either edge of the passageway walls. To get to the other side people must walk underneath it. The work is designed so the huge rock gives the appearance of hovering precariously above (Timotheus Vermeulen 18 December 2013).

only imagine how experiencing the work *in situ* would heighten my impressions. Perhaps it would be similar to the day I was walking through the carved tunnels in the French mountains, palpable tension and trepidation.

When reflecting on these types of experiences, what remains is the suggestion of an inexplicable, tenuous and intangible gap between the sensations of viewing a physical thing – rock with the memory of the intensity of moods and feelings at the time of experience. This provokes an in between sensation of the two qualities observed. In this space lurks the void, as qualities of hesitancy and uncertainty. Amplifying these qualities is a realisation that the longer these experiences linger in time, and are then recalled as memories, that they are prone to alter, fade and disappear. These sequences of the void inform the drawings that I make, but they are intangible qualities based in my mind. The problem this presents I will expand on in section two of this chapter.

It is in my experience of being at places, such as France, where the initial powerful and intense embodied engagements occur. These sensations are palpable, of course less so when looking at a reproduction of an image of Michael Heizer's work, however they do elicit some sort of emotive reaction nonetheless. When I am observing at a site, my aim is to develop greater awareness of my conscious perceptions. These are traits of phenomenology, which throughout the project I embed as a method to better understand and articulate my experience observing void-like things at each site, before translating them into drawings.

1.2: Husserl's Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a type of philosophical inquiry that seeks to clarify, through communication, one's capacity to elaborate on conscious experiences of the world. Crucial to my understanding of phenomenology is the writings of German thinker Edmund Husserl and his book *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* published in 1913. *Ideas* (as I will refer to it from here onwards) sets out the parameters for phenomenology as a science of the essence of being, or, as a method for the rigorous observation and description of conscious experience.

Throughout *Ideas*, Husserl explains his method for analysing conscious experience in response to things as they are perceived. There are many layers of direct experiencing within this phenomenology, such as; reality, memory, imagination, and remoteness that resonate with the types of experiences of rock forms and the void that my project is focused on.

My approach to observing rock forms is based on my own subjective experiences and is existential. Existentialists consider philosophy should commence with one's own personal experience. For example, writers on existential geography David Seamon and Jacob Sowers claim that to understand existentialism one must study human experiences, such as "meanings, actions, situations, and events" (Seamon 2009, p. 4). They argue that to do this we should explore its occurrence in the everyday, as this provides knowledge and understanding of the unique and dynamic nature of experience. This is crucial to Husserl's phenomenology, as it analyses the self in relation to one's conscious experience. To do this, Husserl suggests that we should focus on the essence of our experience.

Husserl's essence concerns the conscious mind being only able to perceive, or observe an essence of something, through one viewpoint at a time. That each alternative viewpoint provides a different perception of that thing. We cannot examine all 'adumbrations' (Husserl 2012, p. xxiii) of a thing in the 'fact world' (Husserl 2012, p. 54) he ponders.⁹ The conscious experience of 'fact world' can only be experienced in part, as various forms of the adumbrations, but never as a true or complete whole. Husserl suggests that in our inner thinking world, when we attempt to perceive a thing, and he gives the example of a tree, it is not a real tree that we think of but an essence and a construct of a tree. In terms of a true wholeness of a thing/object, such as the 'completeness' of a tree, he leaves only for God to be able to decipher. However, amongst Husserl's train of thought here, he also considers that we are able to holistically be aware of some elements of the mind, such as emotions. Because, he says, these can be fully understood or grasped as they emanate from inside of you. To perceive a tree in our mind is to perceive an essence of a tree. Not a real tree but an imagined tree. Whereas we can perceive an emotion by feeling it, but how do we express this? We can only do this with words or images which lack the 'completeness' of the experience (Husserl 2012, p. 151). Within both types of perception, gaps in the 'completeness' of things are apparent. These are the gaps indicative of elements of experience that I consider have void-like qualities.

Husserl writes, to experience one must be conscious. But not all experiences are the same. Perception plays tricks. Memory is a dilution of fact and imagination can never fully grasp the totality of empirical fact. Husserl's notion of phenomenology is essentially a critique of

⁹ Husserl writes of the 'one-sidedness' and 'more-sidedness' of the 'spatial shape of the physical thing' in the 'everyday multiplicity of experience' (Husserl 2012, p. 12). The 'fact world' are the things perceived, he writes, as "'present" before me' (Husserl 2012, p. 52).

empirical knowledge favoured by the natural sciences. He asks us not to seek clarification of lived experience through scientific observation and research or empiricism. Rather he wants us to 'bracket' or 'reduce' this experience. Bracketing, otherwise known as the 'phenomenological reduction', allows our mind to clear itself of extraneous thoughts and in the process, engage fully with the consciousness of the experience as one sees it – whether that be lived, memory or imagination (Husserl 2012, p. 33).

Husserl's bracketing of natural scientific analysis seeks to concentrate purely on the essence that is essential to the thing being observed. A question, such as; 'how it came about?' is bracketed. The experience, bracketed or reduced, leaves only a concentration on the true essence of the thing that remains. Thus, Husserl proposes, one should be able to clearly articulate it. In this, Husserl consistently refers to the term 'eidetic' (Husserl 2012, p. 64) – or "the intuition of essence" (Moutner 2005, p. 181) in reference to defining the shape, visual appearance, idea and form of things.

Following setting out the conditions for 'bracketing' / 'reduction', and the importance of the essence, Husserl examines the method for phenomenology. Within this, he introduces the reader to two key terms:

- Noesis – The act of intentionality of consciousness. Or the consciousness of the real content of the thing. The acknowledgment of things in the mind and what sense that thing gives you – judging or perceiving something, loving or hating it, accepting or rejecting it. What actually takes place in the conscious experience. It is always in relation to the noema.
- Noema – The ideal meaning of the noesis act (Husserl 2012, pp. 182-202).

Within this Husserl rigorously puts his position forward for the phenomenologic method in relation to these structures. He writes that phenomenology is about intentionality – the aptitude to have mental thoughts of things as perceived in consciousness, in the mind. To be able to clearly articulate intentionality, Husserl says, one must apply the ‘phenomenological reduction’ (Husserl 2012, p. 3) for it to activate with clarity.

Husserl’s phenomenologic method provides a way to reveal in more detail, an essence of my experience of observed rock forms. The two primary forms of experience that impact my drawings are; observing the physical forms, or the ‘adumbrations’ on the ‘sensuous surface’, of the rocks as I see them in the world; in combination with the condition or temperament of my thinking emotive mind.

When I am consciously observing rocks like this, I concentrate my thoughts on discrete forms and observe them with rigour before making notes or sketching.¹⁰ Anthropology and archaeology academic Christopher Tilley, explored phenomenology as a method to gain insights into ancient rock formations in Europe. He explains the phenomenologic method he used: “One needs to explore first before recording anything.” My conscious awareness of a site is crucial. Tilley again, “We then know how to look and what to see” (Tilley 2004, p. 223).

¹⁰ An important reason for my wanting to explore phenomenology is that Husserl incessantly implores that the phenomenological method must use precise language, but language, Husserl writes, can be misread, however for the sake of phenomenology, a language of direct relation to phenomena/experience, with clarity, must be used. I add to my stock of written reflection of experiences with photographs, sketches and video as alternative ways to record the ‘lived world’.

My examination of rocks occurs at sites with void-like characteristics, such as where there are gaps or spaces occurring in between rock forms. I examine the 'sensuous surface' of the structures being observed. I take a photograph, sketch it using various flat forms of space or types of dots, dashes and squiggly and angular lines and in a range of tones, and I write some notes. I am aware of my mood and temperament, either brought in to the site by me or how it affects me upon observing it. These elements effect the way I make marks. For example, if I'm feeling frantic and nervous then my mark making will reflect this. Husserl writes of this in broad terms, "The student of nature ... observes and experiments, i.e., he fixes what is concretely there just as he experiences it; experience for him is an act that supplies grounds, and for which mere imagining could never be a substitute. For this very reason science of fact and science of experience are equivalent concepts" (Husserl 2012, p. 18).

Phenomenology presents the grounds on which my observation of nature is structured. My starting point is 'fact of experience' onto which imagining follows in the form of a drawing practice as the pictures I make develop in my studio, not *in situ* in a rocky environment. I retrace what I gather in the sketches and writing and extend the types of marks and pictorial spaces in response to the experience as it lingers in my memory. There is a lag or gap in time from when the experience occurs and its retracing as memory in the studio. Acknowledging the effect of this gap is important. Husserl defines this as the 'second level' (Husserl 2012, p. 97) of seeing.¹¹ In this lingers the void as absence, where moments of experience are lost in memory.

¹¹ Husserl's 'second level' of seeing refers to a direct focus on reflective experiences, as memory of immediate experiences, or as the recall of long past experiences. It consists of various levels or layers of remembering. For example, if I move through a place the stability of my perception of it from one perceptual layout to the next alters. My memories of it, as a

Memories are imperfect but they can reactivate and accentuate traces and rhythms of things previously experienced. Husserl suggests memories do this because they are “a modification of perception” (Husserl 2012, p. 212). An essence, for example of a rock form or the sense of palpable tension and trepidation remain. And comparable to the geological terms used to describe rock, my memories become stratified, fractured, faulted and eroded.

Memories merge the past and present. Memories can be built on with other memories as connections between experiences and can be built upon further into infinitum. They can be mixed and added to current experience in their reproduction (Husserl 2012, p. 296). We are prone to augment significant memories in order to preserve them. But in doing so can also lose track of the original experience, perhaps even altering older memories with such distance that they can become disturbed or disconnected, almost beyond recognition.

Memories thus describe things previously experienced, “replete with absences, silences, condensations and displacements” (Radstone 2000, p. 11). The characteristics of memory explored here, as remembering and forgetting, creates something else. This something else is akin to imagination where a different type of perception develops. The alteration of the qualities of things is void-like, which will be expanded on in the next section.

Phenomenology, as a theory and method, underpins the way I observe my experience at the four sites I have visited and informs the content for this project. The impact of absorbing

place, are thus always dislocated from itself as it disturbs the next view layered upon the next and so on and so forth. However, when I remember a place, such as a tunnel in the French mountains, I identify the essence of the things in it that I was spatially engaged with, such as the rock edges or darkness. This is crucial to my understanding and comprehension of what it is as a place. To exist means to be placed somewhere, so too memories exist by being bound to place. Without place in memory I feel ‘disorientated’ (Casey 2000, pp. 183-184).

phenomenologic inquiry into my technique reveals details about my experience of rock forms along with my psychological condition whilst exploring them. But it also suggests alterations of experience when remembered or forgotten as types of presences and absences. The void is conjured, which in turn I use as a method to learn from the next experience and so on and so forth. Each experience informs the next and within this the void is embedded in different ways. The results attained from one site to the next are broad and variable, because the process of phenomenology reveals things in these places in their own unique way.

1.3: Suspended in the void

At the commencement of this project, I made drawings of rock forms that were derived from my memories of visiting Tasman Island. In my memory, the most striking ‘essence’ I have is of the imposing vertical cliffs, that mark the island’s circumference as they rise 280 to 300 metres above sea level. I perceive the rock on these outer edges with intricate designs of marks and the dark enigmatic spaces between them – fissures, crevices and cave-like sinkholes.¹² Uncanny to say the least, these formations are distinguished by comparatively even-spaced fractures occurring all around the perimeter. In some sections, columns of rock have collapsed and settled onto lower-lying platforms hundreds of feet below the top edge, only to reveal further dark fissures and crevices deeper within.

I can recall times when I have stood at the top of a cliff edge on the island, and felt like the world in my view had frozen in time. In the distance, there was a slowly encroaching fog, and, in a southerly direction, where



Fig. 10. David Edgar, *Cliff edge, Tasman Island*, 2010. Digital image.

¹² Geologist Peter Manchester writes that the fissures in the vertical dolerite columns on Tasman Island were the result of jointing by cooling of intrusive sills about 170 million years ago. Other geological features of significance on the Island include: “tunnels, underwater blowholes, and salt erosion, alongside the biological activity of; solution pans, honeycomb rock surfaces, pits, hollows, shallow gutters, rock doughnuts, and potholes” (Manchester 2010, p. 127).

the nearest land was thousands of kilometres away, vast expanses of deep sea met at the horizon with an equally expansive sky.

I am reminded of a Caspar David Friedrich painting, *Monk by the Sea*, in which the artist has captured a similar moment in time. In the painting, we see a lone monk dressed in black who stands on the edge of the earth looking out across a dark and ominous sea in front of him. He is dwarfed by the vast scale of the surrounding landscape. We can't see his face, because he is turned away, but we sense that he is deeply contemplating something far in the distance. His upper body merges with the inky black surface of the sea. A distant fog that stretches from one side of the canvas to the other, rolls in on top of a crisply defined horizon line. In the top half of the canvas the skies are clearer.



Fig. 11. Caspar David Friedrich, *Monk by the Sea*, 1809. Oil on canvas, 110 x 172 cm. Alte Nationalgalerie.

I am reminded, too, of a comment made by artist Geoff Parr on the meditative qualities of a photographic image that I took on Tasman Island many years ago.¹³ The view in the photograph, taken on the south-east edge of the island, is of a vast sky and sea that meet at the far off but crisply defined horizon. There is no ground or human body in the photograph, just space and the clear central line defining the horizon. It is an abstracted view taken from the island, spatially flattened by the camera.



Fig. 12. David Edgar, *Looking off Tasman Island*, 2008. Digital image.

As the photographer, I feel akin to the monk in Friedrich's painting contemplating a seemingly still and boundless world. While thinking about these elements of the island I experience a sense of vacuousness, as if I am suspended within a state of void. Emptiness,

¹³ The comment was made by Parr following a presentation I made on 1 June 2009 at a post-graduate research symposium. Parr suggested the image of the view out from the island to the horizon presented flatness. This flatness, he considered, concerned looking inwards, towards a contemplation of meditative inner surface qualities rather than illusionistic depth.

nothingness and quietness surround and engulf my senses.¹⁴ Philosopher Edward Casey has examined a similar kind of experience in his book *Getting Back into Place*, in which he finds himself in a similar state in the countryside, likening the emptiness to a great void. He writes;

"One feels lost indeed in a wild country that seems so actively antiresidential. Its emptiness, instead of inviting me to enter and live in it, threw me back on my emptiness, my own solitude... The void without was rejoined by the void within. By another twist of the same implacable landscape logic, an acute lack of habitable place led me to experience myself as deeply displaced, as not belonging there at all. Desolation and displacement intertwine and intensify each other" (Casey 1993, p. 193).

Casey's void speaks of a landscape emptied of physical detail and of minimal content. Of further interest is Casey's reflection on the act of being in a different uninhabitable place as literally being displaced. Casey proposes that the intensity of sensations of displacement, emptiness and solitude of the void override the physical form of things in the world.

A void is something that is lacking, such as a memory that cannot be recalled properly or something that isn't there, or could be there but invisible to the observer. A difficult conundrum of the void is that it persistently questions relationships between physicality and immateriality. This fluctuating content of the void has at times also been described as a

¹⁴ To draw an analogy from film to make my point. Myrto Konstantarakos, in her book *Spaces in European Cinema*, argues that in standard filmmaking (and she cites John Howard Lawson's *Theory and Technique of Screenwriting*), a shot of landscape without a person / character in it is 'dead time (temp morts)' creating with it a sense of anxiety in the viewer. This is consistent with Edward Casey's ideas about space and place, that 'place is defined by presence, or even just the thinkable presence, of humans; without this presence it is frighteningly vacuous and threatens to turn back into abstract empty space' (Konstantarakos 2000, p. 104).

deep and dark formlessness. For example, Casey reflects on these qualities in terms of being placed. In his book *The Fate of Place*, he quotes from the book of Genesis the first chapter of the Hebrew Bible, in relation to the pre-creation of the world: "In the beginning ... earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep..." (Casey 1997, p. 12).¹⁵ Void in this context is characterized by a profundity of darkness and is immaterial in its formlessness when conjured in one's mind.

The implications of this when considering Friedrich's painting *Monk by the Sea*, is that perhaps the monk is in a void-like state of mind while staring out into space. Friedrich declares, in a quality characteristic of an inquiring phenomenologist: "The painter should not paint merely what he sees before him but also what he sees within him. If he sees nothing within himself, then he should refrain from painting what he sees before him" (Hoffman 2000, p. 26). If my assumption is correct, there is a paradox of emptiness represented in the fullness of Friedrich's painting. The painting is full of paint and the representation of material things in the environment is complete within the picture (the sea, the earth and the fog, etc.). However, my reading of emptiness points to the breadth and expansiveness of the landscape around the monk, suggesting characteristics of the void in the shape of inward boundless thinking. The monk and the world are in dialogue.

Mark Levy, in his book *Void – In Art*, postulates the void within as the perceived experience between thoughts, and as a space in which metaphysical, creative and other hyper-conscious states function (Levy 2006, p. 2). These spaces, in between consciousness, reflect

¹⁵ Noam Elcott, in *Artificial Darkness: An Obscure History of Modern Art and Media*, also reflects on this piece of writing from Genesis, however, Elcott explores it in relation to the theoretical contradictions and difficulties that the fullness of darkness and black presents (Elcott 2016, p. 1).

a semi-conscious metaphysical nature of thinking. But Levy suggests that, perhaps, they also reflect the objective activity of being amongst things, such as the blank spaces in an artwork, or the space between two objects, such as around a tree or a rock in nature, or in between written words used in a sentence.

Casey proposes that things exist because they are placed somewhere (Casey 1993, p. 50).¹⁶

The void is difficult because it exists only as a possibility. It is not in place per se. Levy's void, in relation to the spaces between material objects, is placed, but what Levy does is to characterise the potential of the void. Human Geographer, Yi-Fu Tuan, considers place and space to be of a similar type of character however he considers space to be more abstract than place. Whereas open space, for Tuan, "is like a blank sheet on which meaning can be imposed... In open space one can become intensely aware of place; and in the solitude of a sheltered place the vastness of space beyond acquires a haunting presence" (Tuan 1977, p. 54). When I observe a dark shadowy space between two rocks I still see things. I do not see emptiness. I see a mysterious yielding darkness that characterises the potential of the void. Art critic Susan Sontag theorised "In order to perceive fullness, one must retain an acute sense of the emptiness which marks it off; conversely, in order to perceive emptiness, one must apprehend other zones of the world as full" (Sontag 1978, p. 6).

¹⁶ In his elaboration of the pre-creationary void Casey theorizes that all things in the world have a place and that nothing can exist unless it is 'implaced' (Casey 1993, p. 50) in some shape or form. Without place; there is nothing and inversely if there is something, then it has to be in a place. He describes analysing 'implacement' as displacement and as provoking a dualistic concept of the void – that all things are placed against that of placelessness, the latter falling into the realms of abstraction, metaphysics or transcendence. The darkness and deep of the Bible is "the scene of emergent place" (Casey 1997, p. 20) but is still metaphysical. To clarify the point Casey writes, 'In place of the void are places, and all the more so if regions count as places, as surely they must. Already extant are domains of deep and darkness' (Casey 1993, p. 13).

This creates an intriguingly deeper and more complex dialectic. For space to be empty one must engage in concepts of fullness and vice versa. Sontag's comments draw parallels with Jean-Paul Sartre's notion of nothingness, which he speaks to in his book *Being and Nothingness*. Sartre relays a hypothetical story, which is thus: he would walk into a café to look for a specific person, his friend Pierre, that he has arranged to meet there. But Pierre isn't there, even though Sartre imagines Pierre in his mind is there when he is looking around the café for him. The use of the mind to imagine what is thought to be there, Sartre suggests, is based on a realisation that much of our thinking activity is consumed with a consciousness of nothingness. He has a conscious image of something, his friend Pierre, in his mind but, in reality, the person is not there. Therefore, his mind is consciously thinking about something when really that something is nothing because it is not there in reality, it is only an imagined thought (Sartre 2003, pp. 33-36).

Sartre likens this notion of nothingness to the world he is in, yet imagines it as being empty of figure. Because Sartre's attention is on something in his mind, his friend Pierre who is not there (as the figure in front of the ground that Sartre suggests is the café), then all other things in the café disappear into ground. Sartre's observing of the café as figure and ground is speculative. It incorporates Sartre's memory – of the thinking of his friend – in a space where memory, imagination, speculation and nothing co-exist. In a sense, the world of the café is voided.

From this examination, I have come to understand the void as existing in an uncertain threshold zone, mostly immaterial but with the potential for minimal materiality. Mark Levy agitates and counterbalances this threshold by examining Eastern and Western philosophies

of the void in relation to art and suggests how it may be graspable:

"... the void is active energy, like a field, although it is not energy in the usual sense because this energy cannot be apprehended through the normal senses or by mechanical extensions of these senses, namely scientific apparatus. For others, the Void is not an active energy field, but a field of clear or luminous light, or a state of utter stillness, or even just a symbol or mental concept" (Levy 2006, pp. 1-2).

Lee Joon, in an essay about the void in Korean art, adds: "The void is in a state in which a kind of energy, a chi, is alive that is invisible but can be seen by the eye, that can be analyzed but must be felt corporeally" (Morley 2010, p. 103). There is palpable subtlety in the way Levy and Joon present the void here, a point equally considered by Sontag in the following quote about the possibility of the void appearing in art:

"A genuine emptiness, a pure silence, are not feasible – either conceptually or in fact. If only because the artwork exists in the world furnished with many other things, the artist who creates silence or emptiness must produce something dialectical: a full void, an enriching emptiness, a resonating or eloquent silence" (Sontag 1978, p. 7).

Sontag's quote, from her essay *The Aesthetics of Silence*, suggests on the one hand the impossibility of materialising the void. However, on the other, her suggestion of fullness belies subtleties that provoke the void in the simplicity of Levy and Joon's active and embodied energy fields.

The reduction of light to conjure the void, as darkness, is another subtlety. Junichiro Tanizaki in his illuminating little book on darkness, *In Praise of Shadows*, considers this by

reminiscing on the old ways of Japanese culture at a time prior to the book's publication in the 1930s. Tanizaki laments the fact that electric light homogenously illuminates space in Japanese culture. Whereas in his past darkness was an elementary part of experiencing a certain amount of vacuity in the world. In a beautifully crafted section of the book he writes:

"The 'mysterious Orient' of which Western [people] speak probably refers to the uncanny silence of these dark places. And even we as children would feel an inexpressible chill as we peered into the depths of an alcove to which the sunlight had never penetrated. Where lies the key to this mystery? Ultimately it is the magic of shadows. Were the shadows to be banished from its corners, the alcove would in that instant revert to mere void. This was the genius of our ancestors, that by cutting off the light from this empty space they imparted to the world of shadows that formed there a quality of mystery and depth superior to that of any wall painting or ornament" (Tanizaki 2001, p. 33).

I have developed a dialogue with the void into my work because, like Tanizaki, I have become more conscious of it in the observation of dark and mysterious shadows as affecting my mental state. The more conscious I am of this dialogue, the more I see it in response to other things around me, such as in the minutia of or in the gaps between things, and in emotive energy felt in response to a site. Dark shadowy spaces, which I once considered empty, have a fullness in that they conjure qualities of vastness and vacuousness of the void. These dark forms in their subtlety recede and yield, and fire up my imagination to the potential mysteries and depth of what is hidden within.

This analysis of the void suggests that it can be provoked in a material form in a number of ways: as minimal in content; as a fullness when depicting emptiness, and as a contrast between a fullness of something, next to a suggestion of emptiness, and as felt active energy. These qualities provoke my mind to consider the in between state of a thing, and the nothingness or emptiness that composes them in spaces in the world.

1.4: Drawing: line in action

Artist Paul Klee famously confessed in his treatise on the idea and nature of mark making, *The Pedagogical Sketchbook*, that visual communication is essentially made up of ‘an active line on a walk’ (Klee & Moholy-Nagy 1968, p. 18) or a ‘line in action’ (Klee & Moholy-Nagy 1968, p. 63). Klee’s examination of the core attributes of a mark made on a surface elicits Husserl’s phenomenologic observation of the shape, visual appearance, idea, and form of things. Further evidence of this can be found in the following comment that Klee made in 1923. “For the artist communication with nature remains the most essential condition. The artist is human; himself nature; part of nature within natural space” (Klee & Moholy-Nagy 1968, p. 7).

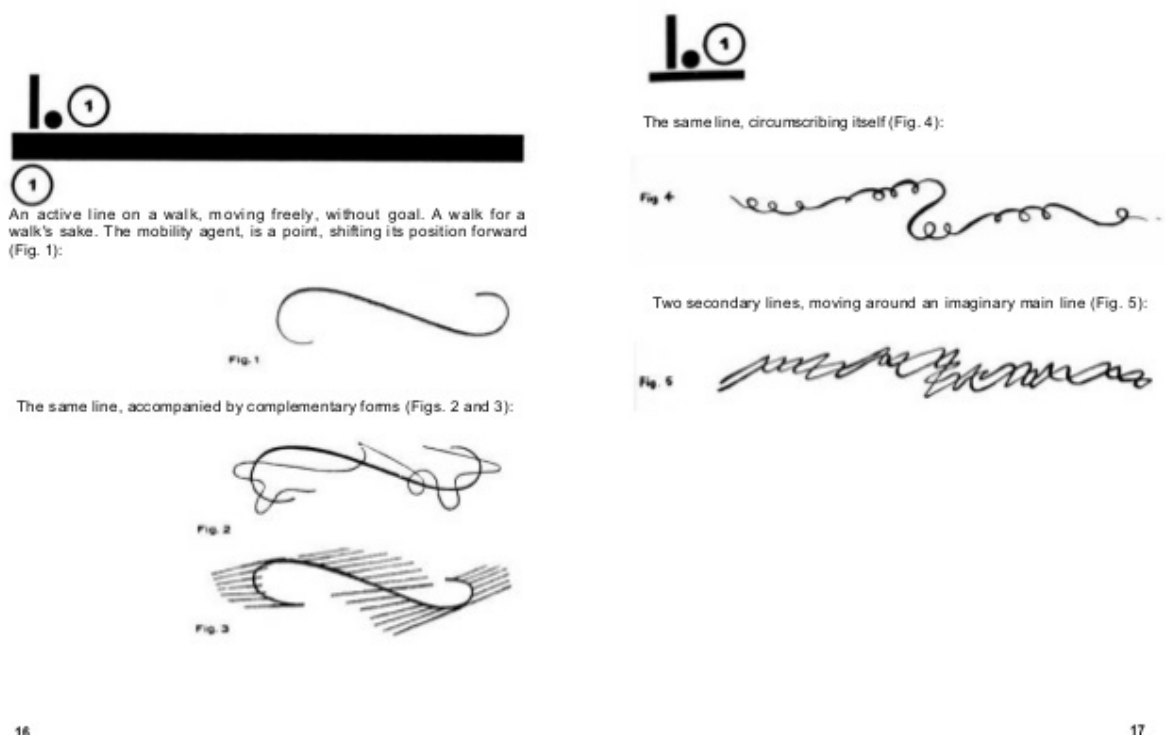


Fig. 13. Paul Klee, *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, Screen shot of pages 16-17 (*Pedagogical Sketchbook*, Klee & Moholy-Nagy 1968).

For Klee, art and nature were one and the same thing. In his 'Sketchbook' he energises descriptions of marks, through words, to examine visual communication with the conscious experience of the process or act of drawing. Some of the words he used include, 'active', 'medial', 'passive', 'linear energy', and 'linear impact' and in a broader sense 'structure', 'embodiment', 'repetition', 'energy', 'symmetry' and 'non-symmetry', 'horizontal' and 'verticality', 'scale', 'motion' and 'activation', and the tensions that these provide 'between man's ability to project himself and the object into space' (Klee & Moholy-Nagy 1968, p. 10).

Klee's little book urges the reader to consider the relevance of the connection between body, mind and mark making by asking us to probe into an open-ended and ongoing dialogue with the dynamics of visual communication. Klee suggests, through mark making and writing, that marks exist everywhere and in everything – in the world as well as in the body and mind. His observation engages a two-way embedded communication between nature and artist. Klee provokes me to explore rocks with dynamic forms of dots, lines and scribbles as I observe them existing in the world. But, his commentary also suggests the potential for being able to manifest a more difficult type of mark, one that reflects the consciousness of my emotive mind's perspective of experience – be it in the physical world or through memory.

The characteristics of drawing are broad and mysterious, particularly its relationship to the things in my thinking mind and the doing or making of a line or mark. Engaging with this complex interpretation of drawing is Alain Badiou, who, in an essay published in 2014, examines drawing as a type of 'seeming' (Badiou 2014, p. 76). Badiou's thinking about drawing indicates how drawing transforms things by giving form to deeper and alternative

types of understandings and expressions of the world. Badiou attempts to explore an 'essence' of drawing, and in doing so provokes characteristics of the subtlety of the void. He conjures this as relationships between imagining things in the mind, by acknowledging the blank space of a drawing's surface paper for example, and as the space or gaps that occur between the thinking mind and the act of making marks.

In Badiou's essay, titled *Drawing: On Wallace Stevens*, he cites examples of verses in Stevens' poem *Description Without Place* where Stevens is writing of the sun in the sense of it as being and as seeming (Badiou 2014, pp. 75-82). Badiou, in relation to the poem, considers when one thinks of the sun, there is the real sun and then there is an impression of the sun as poetically manufactured by writing. In a sense, Badiou matches Husserl's earlier example of imagining an essence or a construct of a tree as perceived in one's consciousness. Badiou reiterates his point by quoting a short passage of Stevens writing: "description is composed of a sight indifferent to the eye". However he also argues that the poet is attempting to "fix a point where appearing and being are indiscernible" (Badiou 2014, p. 77).

In relation to drawing, Badiou says, this is where the mark or trace coalesces with the white background or surface. Where the mark is at once a being and a seeming, thus, they are the equivalent of existing and not existing. He continues that the paper as surface exists, but the marks do not exist by themselves rather they compose something on the surface.

Badiou also declares that a background as surface does not exist, “because it is created as such, as an open surface, by the marks.”¹⁷ This ‘moveable reciprocity’ (Badiou 2014, p. 77) of material, mark and space is Badiou’s essence and fragility of a drawing. This description of drawing also encompasses Mark Levy’s view about the void occurring in the space or gaps between words.

Expanding on the notion of mark and background as surface, Derek Pigrum asserts the studio similarly acts as a kind of surface, with both studio and background surface (paper as example) acting as membranes from which a drawing emerges (Pigrum 2010). Further, an artist whilst drawing, fuses with the drawing medium and the surface as they are absorbed in the act of drawing as a mark is made onto a surface. John Rajchman writes, “the act of drawing dismantles consciousness and plunges the self into a zone of experience or sensation liberated from the closures of representation and open to the free play of possibilities” (Tate Gallery. et al. 2003, p. 220). Thus, a drawing is the manifestation of a fragile relationship that binds the thinking speculative mind with the body, in my case generally the arm and hand, etc., and the medium (for example charcoal), to a surface and a studio. If, at the time of making a mark, consciousness is dismantled, then what occurs? The act of drawing has encompassed the void.

Drawing thus fuses ideas, memories, temporality, emotions, the senses and the body. There is an intriguing example of this implied in a self-portrait by German artist Käthe Kollwitz

¹⁷ In an interesting side note, Avis Newman also considers the whiteness of the page functioning in the manner of Badiou, however she adds that it “also alludes to that space of our inner reality where the immaterial world of dreams and the mental impressions that run through us and evaporate into other thoughts dissipate in the fragmented world of our senses and defy any totalizing” (Tate Gallery. et al. 2003, p. 235).

from 1933. In the work, the artist has drawn in a realistic fashion, her portrait in profile and her hand holding a piece of charcoal in the act of drawing. Near her hand is a drawing board in profile represented by a simple line. The fascinating part of the work is the way Kollwitz has drawn the internal contours of her arm, the conduit between her head and hand, with rapid abstracted marks suggestive of the energy of a compressed coiled spring. The drawn treatment of the arm, made with loose, vertical scribbly mark making, entices my reading of the picture as the physical manifestation of this void-like state of being whilst in the act of drawing. The picture captures the fragility of the process of drawing as the speculative artist's mind is caught in the act of thinking about making a physical mark. Kollwitz's drawing of her own arm in this way suggests wavering ideas that extend the act of mark making during its transition from thinking mind to hand.

The drawing of the arm represents abstract mark making, the potential of drawing itself. The arm embodies the possibilities of drawing, located midway between the realistically drawn representations occurring in the mind when being translated and transformed via the hand. The arm, in scribbled form, embodies the space or void-like gap in between.



Fig. 14. Käthe Kollwitz, *Self-portrait*, 1933. Charcoal on brown laid Ingres paper, 47.7 × 63.5 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington DC.

Badiou continues, "Drawing is something that is composed", therefore it is an artificiality. A drawing "is not a copy of something. It is a constructive deconstruction of something, and much more real than the initial thing ... [it is] intenser than actual life. A drawing is fragile. But it creates a very intense fragility" (Badiou 2014, p. 79).

When I draw, there is a relationship between presence and absence, an instability of the figure and ground relationships in the unravelling placement of related yet unrelated marks that I make onto a surface. To highlight this effect, in elements of some of my drawings, the paper is intentionally left blank to allow a tension between the surface, as a non-existent background and as a surface to develop. As Avis Newman describes, drawing is the externalisation of 'vague thoughts' (Tate Gallery. et al. 2003, p. 78). These vague thoughts are conscious manifestations of the void.

Jacques Derrida, like Badiou, writes of the act of drawing as being a search for the translation of objects through the body, hand and eye, with the use of materials (such as charcoal) and surface (paper) (Derrida & MusÈe du Louvre. 1993). For Derrida though, drawing's 'vague thoughts' and 'artificiality' are the traits of a thing, or traces, which is the ruin of that thing. Not ruin as in destruction, but as in defacement. Or as a rearrangement or shift/change in the thing being drawn.¹⁸ A ruin of the object remains invoked in the drawing.

Derrida ponders this as a type of non-seeing and presents an analogy of the blind. He writes of the blind as, at times, having a greater sensory awareness than those with clear vision.

¹⁸ Crucial to this thinking is that drawing re-interprets three-dimensional objects through mark making qualities into two-dimensions. Avis Newman writes of this as "an act of reconstruction that moves unobtrusively between interior and exterior" (Tate Gallery. et al. 2003, p. 82).

For example, a blind person may have a more attuned sense of hearing, or in their reaching out for clarity with touch – and feeling their way around things with their hands held out in front of them – they parallel with the mark maker when making a drawing. As a blind person might do, I am an artist who uses drawing to find (and represent) by holding out my hands and arms in front of me and feeling my way around a surface.

Derrida's thinking provokes the void in the notions of drawing being a ruin of a thing and as a type of non-seeing. He provokes the theory of phenomenology, in acknowledging that drawing cannot holistically record experience but is used as a method to engage a deeper understanding of things. For Derrida drawing is based in the idea of Husserl's 'second level' of seeing – as the memory of the just remembered short term. He writes, "As soon as the draftsman considers himself, fascinated, fixed on the image, yet disappearing before his own eyes into the abyss, the movement by which he tries desperately to recapture himself is already, in its very present, an act of memory" (Derrida & Musée du Louvre. 1993, p. 68). The coiled scribbly line in Kollwitz's drawn arm acts as a metaphor for the abyss or blindness that occurs in the act of Derrida's description of drawing. Within this is a void-like gap between the thinking mark and the actual mark made.

The act of drawing is in itself, an act of unravelling streams of consciousness. Drawing can invoke layers of experience into a whole, and embed broader and deeper levels of information from the mind into what is being drawn (Ed: Jane Tormey 2007, p. XVII). Drawing, like phenomenology, is an inaccurate means of holistically describing experience. It can be used as the framework and method to better understand it as it engenders a

process of deeper learning about things, being drawn by the act of getting to know the things better, through the translation of those things into marks.

Drawing's great mystery is its fusion of the "infinite space of sensation in both the sensations of the body and the sensations of the mind" (Tate Gallery. et al. 2003, p. 233) in relation to the material world. I use drawing to explore representing qualities of the void as located in the experience of things. When I start a drawing, I use exploratory and suggestive lines. These lines relate to the types of marks I observe existing at each site. These lines also explore the interval between felt experience and memory. Deanna Petherbridge proposes artists use drawing, particularly loose forms of sketching, to explore new ideas, render thoughts and emotions visible in an immediate way, and to capture "nuances of the observed world" (Petherbridge 2010, pp. 2-4). John Willats writes of the artist relinquishing "the object to the obscure necessity of drawing as such," (Tate Gallery. et al. 2003, p. 218) and John Ruskin wrote in similar terms stating this is the artist seeking the "leading lines" of things, "that embody in their very formation the past history, present action and future potential of a thing" (Ingold 2007, pp. 129-130).

Phenomenologically speaking, each suggestive mark that I make projects my embodied knowledge and memory of the observed world. Each mark has its own personality, mood and rhythm. A drawing evolves as the marks continue against and over each other over time. A mark made activates against another mark made. A drawing becomes and develops an overall personality. The drawing thus is embedded with the observation of physical and existential qualities of experience. Paul Crowther notes, "the image affirms itself through the autographic presentation of spatiality more than through signification" (Crowther 2017,

p. 6). The act of drawing concerns an uncertain spatiality whereas the outcome presents, and is embedded, with signification.

Drawing is a type of visual alchemy, a concoction of energy and expression, pace, flow, movement and duration, intimacy and immediacy, a description of experimentation with form, play, memory and embodied knowledge, exaggeration, informality, additionally dreaming and imagination. When these things collaborate, and something else emerges, is when drawing comes alive.



Phenomenology engages observation of conscious experience of the essence of things as they appear in the world. The process involves faithfully recording embodied experiences of things observed in reality, and as memory and imagination. An important factor of the phenomenologic approach is to attain a deeper interpretation of one's psychological disposition at the time of experiencing.

The types of experiences that underpin this project are structured around the concept of materialising subtleties of the void as observed in connections between feeling and material things. The void is a state of dialogue in the thinking mind of emptiness and negation, however, a review of literature on the void shows that it can be materialised as subtleties of form. These subtleties include combinations of place and space, presence and absence, and vacuousness and emptiness. They are manifest in the form of things, depicted as minimal in content, such as energy or light or darkness. Or as the perception of the fullness of things

that have empty qualities, such as a minute crack or a dark crevice in a corner or a gap, like a cave entrance between rock forms. With my perception focused, and with exploratory recording of these forms, the experience is heightened by the qualities of my moods and feelings at the time of observation. For example, melancholy, or being on edge. The subtlety of the physical void combines with qualities of the immaterial emotive mind. The in between gap or space of these qualities register as being void-like. The concept of the void informs the observation and translation of the experience of the subject matter being drawn and the process to which it takes form in the fragile act of drawing – as lines, marks, scribbles, erasures and tones.

Drawing as an artistic method, used to manifest marks found in the observation of void-like characteristics in nature, is used by many artists to express forms, with loose exploratory and speculative mark making. The transformative qualities of drawing, embedded with an intensity of the artists' personality; informed by their moods; emotions; and experiences and memories of things in the world, drives many artists' working methods. At times, the effect of the void is conjured, sometimes unconsciously or sub-consciously and for others consciously, as these relationships flow, combine and react, with and against each other.

Chapter 2: Layers of experience, agitating the void, and altered space

In philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's book *Phenomenology of Perception*, he considers the artist in their work giving birth to a concentration or a "coming-to-itself of the visible" of the world (Merleau-Ponty 2002, p. 276). A key observation from Chapter One is that my sketches and writing, made directly following the observation of streams of conscious experience at each site, contain small and subtle gaps and absences of the experience just observed. From collecting this material, I go into my studio, cognisant of Merleau-Ponty's 'concentration', and plan giving form to the visible inclusive of the emotive elements of my experience before making the drawings. The time spent making the drawings broadens the small gaps and absences of the previously observed experiences. This diminishes and reduces the multi-layered depth and sensuous subtleties of the transitory and evolving nature of the initial experience. For example, the drawings lack the smells and textures of the things observed. Rather, they are a type of fixed memory. The experiences are limited by what the drawings can accommodate. One way this occurs is that the framed edges of the picture plane limit the view of immersive experience. From such limitations, however, alternative interpretations of the visual form of the world emerges. Such as, some drawings portray many layers of drawing relative to numerous streams of experiences, thereby heightening the effect of multiple elements or combinations of streams of conscious experience.

The function of this chapter is concerned with the artistic contextual field in which the project is based. It expands on the ideas drawn upon previously by examining a broad range of methods and techniques used by artists in their art making. Each of these artists, in their

own existential way, have developed dynamic forms of mark making and pictorial approaches. I have analysed their concepts as well as working processes and methods in relation to phenomenology and the void. In most cases, they are artists who use processes and techniques with expressive mark making. This includes the use of line and erasure, contrasts of tone, as well as photography, technology, and layering techniques to develop their compositions. Each of the artists considered in this chapter have or do explore visualising the exterior world with speculative approaches as a way to develop an array of spatial and psychological tensions in their work. The latter point will be substantiated through an investigation of the filmic qualities of Italian Michelangelo Antonioni.

2.1: Layers of experience – Cézanne, Goya, Turcot, McKeever

The rock forms that interest me are located at sites with void-like characteristics in remote places; such as isolated islands; dark dank basements; or in the high-altitude desert and slot canyons of central Arizona. My observation of these sites occurs as a kind of meditation into my thinking self as influenced by my perceptions of the void. I focus on the essence of an experience observed from each site. From this I explore tensions between space and place, where there is evidence of the presence and absence of rock, such as eroded rock forms or different types of fissures, crevices or dark shadowy forms. Through drawing these sites, I aim to develop psychological and pictorial tensions in the work relative to the void.

I am drawn to each site due to the tensions I see and feel in my perceptions. A dialogue between myself and site is entered into. To paraphrase American thinker J. B Jackson¹⁹, I am

¹⁹ US thinker J. B Jackson, when writing about the vernacular landscape, suggests that we are not spectators of landscape rather we are participants in it, and that we affect landscape and it affects us, (his writing on the subject includes an example of an area of land that is similar in form but is separated by the US/Mexican border and how each of these landscapes is shaped and is

a part of all of the rocky sites as I enter into them and, in turn, they enter into me.

Christopher Tilley recognises these types of places, “we form them, they form us” (Tilley 2004, p. 221). This commentary parallels with Klee’s communion of nature and art in the previous chapter and suggests that my relationship to things in the world is an ongoing, evolving, open ended and cyclical one.

A more complex picture of my experience of rock forms emerges. When I look at a rock form it provides a link between sensibility, materiality and thinking. Every time I venture into a wild rocky place I carry with me the mystery and uncertainty of what I experience in my observation of things and my state of mind whilst observing. There may be an array of feelings of disorientation; anxiety of not knowing; of getting lost, or of being caught out by the terrain or the weather. Each material element of landscape affects different types of inner immaterial landscapes, tempered by my wonder, excitement, trepidation, energy and/or exhilaration. It is a multi-sensory exchange and experience between myself and the world.

My interest in phenomenology, the void and drawing contemplates these relationships between things (rock forms) and their surrounds relative to being an artist and the remembered experiences, and the marks, surface and the working studio. Phenomenology

used very differently from the other). Whereas John Wylie writes, “... landscapes are human, cultural and creative domains as well as, or even rather than, natural or physical phenomena... So it would seem that the choice is squarely eye over land, subjective perception over objective entity. But in practice most people want to have both, or want to claim that subjective and objective both exist, albeit in different ways. We perform this division all the time. We assume, on the one hand, the existence ‘out there’ of an objective, phenomenal and material landscape of facts and figures, slopes and rocks and motorways and other measurable processes. Then, on the other hand, we acknowledge a subjective, perceptual and imaginative landscape composed of ideas, dreams, signs and symbols, cultural values, conflicting viewpoints, conventions and landscapes in two, in words, we divide them up into ‘material’ and ‘mental aspects’, objective and subjective, science and art, nature and culture” (Wylie 2007, p. 8).

attunes my observation to the experience, of mood, emotion and atmosphere, in combination with the physicality of the things I'm looking at. There are many examples of artists throughout history who have worked within these parameters. A starting point for discussion to contextualise my work, I have narrowed down to a few key artists. Beginning with four; Frenchman – Paul Cézanne, Spaniard – Francesco Goya, and contemporary artists; Canadian – Susan Turcot and Englishman – Ian McKeever.

What is primarily of interest regarding these four artists is their speculative methods of interpreting experience with linear formations of mark making. Each has a unique way of simultaneously representing; disrupting/distorting pictorial space in their work following close observation and interpretation of the world.

2.1.1: Paul Cézanne

My focus of interest in Cézanne is his pencil and watercolour drawings, and some paintings, completed late in his career. Particularly, the structure of Cézanne's geometrical rendering of landscape as it disrupts the pictorial space of the subject matter, and figure/ground relationships in the works.

A notable representation of this occurs in a small painting Cézanne produced in 1906, in the final year of his life. Titled *Jardins Les Lauves*, it measures only 2.5 x 3.1 cm. In this small space Cézanne presents a complex, dynamic picture of a landscape scene. A deep horizon appears just above the centre of the canvas. Painted foreground areas appear at the top left (as a section of overhanging tree branches and leaves) and at the bottom middle and right (as loosely painted areas of light green grass). The bottom part of the mid-section presents a

cacophony of vertically placed marks of relatively equal size. They are painted in many different colours to represent reddish-brown house roofs, dark green trees and the reflective blue of the sky. The upper component of the middle section suggests a deep receding blue skyline half filled with clouds. There is also an ambiguous light pink section, representing a mountain in distance. Overall, the treatment of brush strokes, or marks, is loosely worked as parallel, equally sized, vertical strokes. Many sections of the canvas are left blank even though there is an all-over working of the composition across the picture plane.



Fig. 15. Paul Cézanne, *The Garden at Les Lauves (Le Jardin des Lauves)*, 1906. Oil on canvas, 2.575 x 3.188 cm.
The Phillips Collection.

A visual reading of the picture oscillates between a material representation of a landscape scene and the surface treatment of planar marks systematically applied in controlled sizes,

shapes and directions of counteracting vertical formations. The vertical marks and pictorial forms work both together and against each other to create tension between subject matter and the gesture of marks made. The visual effect causes a compression or collapse of background into foreground spaces. This creates a dynamic surface patterning on the picture plane. Images hover on the verge of abstraction, or as a complete 'disintegration and loss' (Crary 1999, p. 288) of the presence of a landscape being depicted.

Philosopher Martin Heidegger in 1974 wrote about this effect and his comments resonate with Badiou's observations on drawing as description without place: "What Cézanne calls *la réalisation* is to let things appear in the clearing of their presence – in such a way that the separation between (i.e., the twofold of) these appearances and their appearing is resolved in the simplicity (i.e., into the onefold) of the pure shining of his pictures" (Sallis 2015, p. 31). Far from simple, this period in Cézanne's oeuvre delicately balances phenomenologic observation as pictorial illusionism and abstraction in his artworks.

In Cézanne's *Jardins Les Lauves*, we see the landscape operating in two ways, as the 'one outside the self' fusing with the 'one within' (Lopez 2001, p. 64); a landscape of tension, "between proximity and distance, body and mind, sensuous immersion and detached observation" (Wylie 2007, p. 1). Cézanne's mind and body combination of experience is found in the marks he made and the white spaces around them. These blank white spaces have void-like qualities because they suggest absences of his observation of experience.

Cézanne would often work with the same object or environment many times over. Merleau-Ponty, in his essay *Cézanne's Doubt*, suggests that this brought him closer to his ideal of

fusing nature and art. For Cézanne getting to know the same environment, and its 'sensuous surface', was a way to respond to it with greater intensity. As has been explored phenomenology provides a similar approach, of concentration relative to the awareness of the conscious experience of the appearance of things. Cézanne painted from his conscious experience. With rigour in his evaluation and painterly constructions of the things in the environment that were in front of him.²⁰

2.1.2: Francisco Goya

Similarly, Francisco Goya developed a method of making marks that collapses foreground and background spaces within his pictures through convergences of linear mark making. In contrast to Cézanne, the surface treatment of Goya's images is densely drawn, which is best exemplified in a number of etchings he made, such as; *Funereal folly* (plate 18, from the *Disparates series*, 1820-1823), *Death of Pepe Hillo* (3rd composition, from the *Tauromaquia series*, pl. F., 1815-1816), and *Sad presentiments of what is to come* (from the *Disasters series*, Pl. 1, 1808-1814). Each of the three images is infused with dramatic content and subject matter, occurring as either the depiction of symbolic fantasy or as reality. However, putting drama aside and focusing in on the way the formal elements of the pictures are drawn, the common relationships occurring between the methods of mark making and subject can be seen.

²⁰ Cézanne's process for the placement of marks on canvas included factoring in the changes that occurred in his observation brought on by his own subtle movements. He developed this approach when he realized that his movements, even if ever so slight, caused a change in the pictorial effect of what he was observing. The change, by being consciously observed by him, was invested into the artwork as a change in the position of the marks made, causing his landscape depictions to subtly shift and, at times, vibrate with each different observation and placement of marks. William Dunning suggests "Cézanne's fractured perspective, which fragments the location of the viewer into a myriad of disconnected locations – one for each separate object, plane, or view – may be seen to suggest a pluralistic, rather than a single, viewer" (Dunning 1991, pp. 150-151). Dunning suggests that in making an artwork from observation an artist should consider what also to leave out, what to omit, or what not to work with, and thus make decisions about the absence of materiality of form as well as its presence.



Fig. 16. Francisco Goya, *Funereal folly, plate 18, Disparates series*, 1820-1823. Etching, aquatint, lavis, burnisher, drypoint and burin on paper, 24.2 x 35.1 cm. The Robert Tanenbaum Family Trust.

The outer edges of the picture plane, in all three images, consists of dark forms, built up by linear hatching. The eye of the viewer is drawn into the central action. Here Goya defines a focal point in each image by allowing the white of the surface of the paper to be illuminated. At first glance the heavily worked peripheral dark areas appear abstract and content-less, or as dark void-like spaces. A closer inspection reveals the faint recognition of people and objects, which appear to be hovering above the central action of the lighter areas of the pictures. These dark, densely worked spaces create complexity for the viewer in understanding whether or not the setting is an interior or exterior one. Goya's density of line not only delineates an active focus on the subject matters' actions but it also flattens the pictorial space, by bringing the space of the composition forward in the picture plane.



Fig. 17. Francisco Goya, *Sad presentiments of what is to come*, *Disasters series*, Pl. 1. 1810–1820. Etching with aquatint, 20.3 × 24.8 cm. Sarah Campbell Blaffer Foundation, Houston.

These are violent themed images, conducive to the abrasive qualities of the etching process. Like Cézanne, Goya's subject matter, content and methods visually coalesce for attention accentuated by energy and distortions in the process of mark making.

2.1.3: Susan Turcot

Canadian born artist Susan Turcot has similarly developed a unique way of using drawn marks to disrupt pictorial space in her artworks. Evidence of this can be found in a series of drawings she made between 2003 titled 'Divided Subjects'.

For example, in her work from this series titled *Beguine*, on the left side of the picture is a person standing in front of a realistically drawn area of tall trees with thick foliage. There is a small section at the top of the trees left blank suggesting an area of background sky. There

is no horizon. The person standing in the foreground holds up an antenna. However, the right side of the picture is in complete contrast to the left. Instead of a coherent representational image of things, the picture has been worked with random scribbles. Essentially, the picture plane is split in the centre between the two types of images.

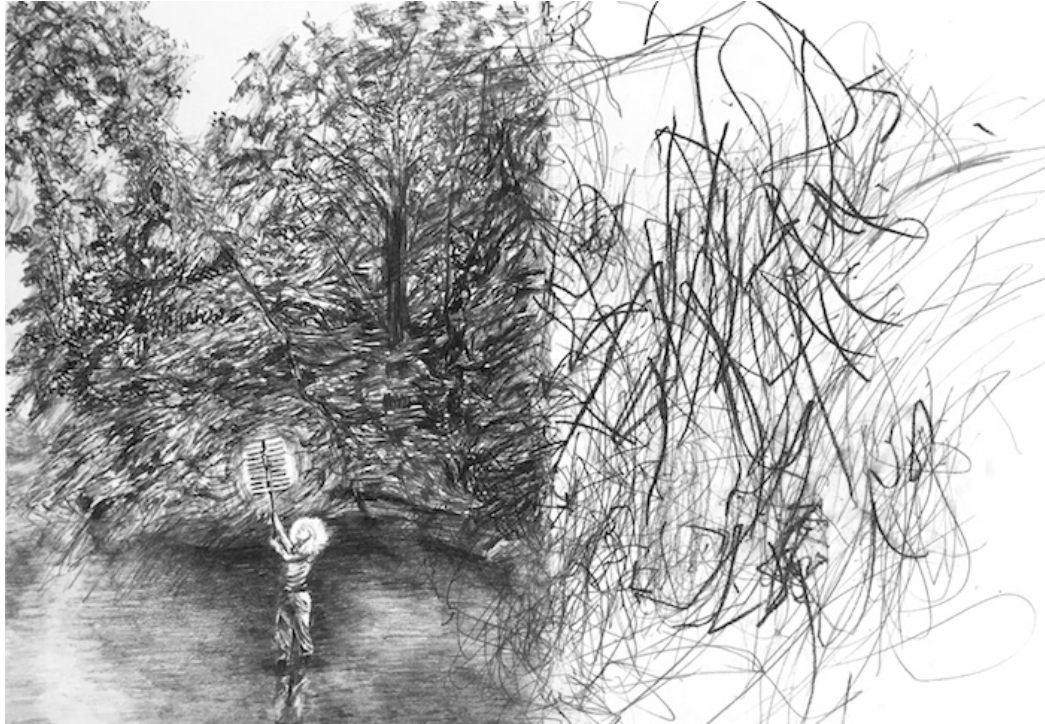


Fig. 18. Susan Turcot, *Beguine* from the series 'Divided Subjects', 2003. Graphite on paper 30 x 40 cm. Ardent & Partner, Berlin/Zurich.

The left side is representative and descriptive of the activity being undertaken by the person surrounded by trees. The random scribbles on the right completely disrupts the illusionary perception of the figure/ground relationship of the person and landscape surrounds on the left. Or rather than disrupt, the contrast creates a new type of expressive pictorial dynamic.

Turcot's work rearranges the qualities of observed experience as found in Cézanne's painting, *Jardins Les Lauves*. Although, like Cézanne she carefully represents what she sees in the world, she also carefully represents what she feels through the abstract qualities of

the scribbles. Her drawing simultaneously represents an experience of the world, as a combination of things materially experienced and of the way it is existentially experienced.

Caitlin Woolsey suggests Turcot's scribbly lines;

“act as an intermediary between the drawing's realm and the viewer, forcing an awareness of his or her removal from the image. Perhaps Turcot intends the scrabble of lines to hover in stark relief against the scrupulous realism of the image, enticing the viewer to investigate the drawing more closely, while at the same time reinforcing the eternal divide between artist and subject, image and viewer” (Berry, Shear & Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery. 2011, p. 190).

The 'eternal divide between artist and subject, image' is also represented in the scribbles of Kollwitz's arm in her self-portrait drawing previously analysed. These scribbles are the visualized counterpart between observed material objective things and mood and emotion when experiencing. Turcot's picture delineates control and chance, as order and clarity next to chaos and confusion. Norman Bryson suggests Turcot made the work with both eyes open (to draw the left side), and shut (to make the scribbles on the right) as a way to “withdraw into a deeper, pure interiority” (Bryson 2006, p. 85). Turcot's method, portraying the interiority of the workings of the thinking emotive mind as random scribbles, proposes a dynamic method for combining with the drawn representation of material things as seen in the world to manifest combinations of conscious experience.

2.1.4: Ian McKeever

In the mid-1970s, English artist Ian McKeever began exploring a process of layering drawing with photographs, stimulating an artistic inquiry which continues to influence his practice

today. For McKeever, his initial interest was the relationships that occurred between the two mediums' formal qualities. McKeever chose landscape as the subject matter as a way to deal with what it meant to him and he says of this: "My work is concerned with the juxtaposition of landscape and cultural activities such as drawing and photography. There is a dialogue going on between those activities, the activities of the landscape, my participation in the landscape and concerns in the studio" (McKeever, I & Arnolfini Gallery, 1979, p. 2). An example of this dialogue occurs in his *Waterfall* series from the late 1970s. McKeever exhibited a photograph of a frozen waterfall enlarged in size. Next to it, he placed a drawing that he made adjacent to the same waterfall occurring in the photograph. The drawing is a blown-up version of a sketch McKeever had made *in situ* of the waterfall – in a process that mirrors the enlargement of the photograph.



Fig. 19. Ian McKeever, *Waterfalls No.1*, 1979. Silver gelatine print, and charcoal and pastel on paper, 152 x 172 cm. (www.ianmckeever.com)

The photograph, he wrote, contains the “maximum amount of information ... already established out in the landscape”. Whereas the sketches inform “the extent to which I could use residual information that I'd gathered from my experience of having been in the landscape” (McKeever, I & Arnolfini Gallery. 1979, p. 4). Of interest to McKeever is the distortions and abstractions found in the surface qualities of both images as they transformed through the ‘blowing up’ process.

Mark Prince, in his extended essay on McKeever’s early oeuvre, suggests these works entertain phenomenological ambiguities in that they represent a subject (through photography) as well as the representation of the subject's representation (through drawing) (McKeever, MPal 2014, p. 14).

Both images, juxtaposed next to each other, produce the final work. The black and white notes that form the basic marks of photography simultaneously relate and oppose with the black and white drawn marks. For McKeever, photography is closed – a surface texture with grain as a tonal framework, effected by the amount of sensitivity to light – whereas the drawing is open. He once wrote – “the photograph is a decision to leave something out; with drawing is a decision to put something in” (McKeever, MPal 2014, p. 30).

Photography is illusory in its completeness, drawing is speculative – it contains gaps, and is as improvised and unfinished as nature itself. Drawing, McKeever ponders, is:

“... putting something down, that I'm not primarily involved with looking at what is out there, which I am trying to depict, but that I'm involved in the physical act that gets something out on the surface, making marks... and that it is only on a secondary

level that one goes on to question what is established by those marks... I want them [the works] to have that sense of being made, of being concerned with putting things onto a surface rather than being concerned primarily with what is out there, and with representing something" (McKeever, I & Arnolfini Gallery. 1979, p. 6).

The effect of the viewer being able to simultaneously consider the marks made in combination with the illusion of an image of something, in this case a landscape, has a similar effect of Cézanne's *Jardins Les Lauves* painting discussed previously. It can also be seen in McKeever's work *Untitled* from 1985, and his *Lapland* series developed in the late 1980s. In these works, photographic imagery and drawing layer, merge and overlap in contrast to being placed next to each other.

The resulting pictures form glimpses of a photographic landscape amongst drawn shapes that seem to be both randomly and purposefully placed onto the pictures surface. For McKeever, drawing and photography are 'processes' (Godfrey 1990, p. 33) used to explore his participation in the world. These artworks articulate the merging of different types of observed experience of being within a landscape. Changes and differences occur in the process of recording and capturing it, presenting shifts in the way



Fig. 20. Ian McKeever, *Untitled*, 1985. Pencil, gouache and photograph on paper, 105 x 75 cm. Gerlinde Gabriel, Hartgrove, (Ian McKeever: Works on Paper 1981-1996, Green 1996).

the landscape artworks, and the marks that make it, are read.

McKeever's approach is in dialogue with nature and culture. He is attempting "to touch those things which one does not know and perhaps cannot be known" (Mogensen 2011, p. 107). His process driven approach explores where collected information shimmers and vibrates, and contests and compromises with and against each other. McKeever's layering processes creates new impressions of the experiential world. Like Cézanne and Turcot, the combination of these elements suggests both straight forward representations of things as observed in the world as well as the expression of mood and feeling in the observation and interpretation of those things.

In Cézanne, Goya, Turcot and McKeever there are tensions found in the formal qualities of mark making in their work. Their pictures combine observations of experience, as images representing things viewed in the world, inclusive of the artists' temperament in relation to the viewing and interpretation of those things. I build on these approaches in my work to explore ways in which marks and subject matter simultaneously collude and contradict each other, as they distort illusionary relationships of three-dimensional depth and two-dimensional flatness on the surface of the picture plane, in their acknowledgment of the things as I see and feel them as observed in the world.

2.2: Layers of tone – Virtue, Štrukelj, Auerbach

In this section, I examine three artists; John Virtue; Miha Štrukelj and Frank Auerbach. Specifically for the way in which each uses tonal variations to explore spatial dynamics, as a means to psychologically heighten the impact of the experience of the things they depict in

their artworks. With Virtue – I analyse his use of black ink and white paint to create dramatic sensations of the place he is working from; Štrukelj, for his technical experiments layering a wide range of tonal value from dense black through to ghostly light grey, as a way to create impressions of the memory of an intense event; and finally, Auerbach who works a drawing many times over, in multiple sittings and in multiple layers, with an acknowledged process of applying marks and erasing them.

2.2.1: John Virtue

In 2005, at the culmination of a two-year residency at the National Gallery in London, English artist John Virtue exhibited a series of large-scale black and white spatially dynamic paintings/drawings. The series, titled *London Paintings*, was developed by Virtue after seeing a number of paintings, drawings and prints from the National Galleries collection,²¹ whilst sketching London's urban cityscape and skylines from up on the galleries' roof. Upon completion of numerous sketches and hours spent in the gallery considering works of art, Virtue developed a substantial body of large-scale artworks by using only white acrylic paint and black inks in a studio provided to him in the basement of the gallery.

Virtue's artworks from this period examine a broad and considered range of experience. He incorporates his observations of London from the roof; combined with the art works from the collection he was examining, altering the conventional horizontally positioned viewpoint of a city from this vantage point through a process of fluctuating and filtered memory of time and space. The resulting artworks homogenise representations of the environment he

²¹ For example, from the collection he examined the paintings of John Constable and Franz Kline, etchings of Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn and Albrecht Dürer and drawings of Georges-Pierre Seurat and Vincent van Gogh to name a few.

was working in. Virtue comments on this: "I want to move away from the notion of impression – a cold winter's day in London, for instance. I work right across seasons, time and weather. I'm not interested in capturing a fleeting moment" (Kingston 2005). Viewing these artworks gives the impression of drifting in and out of the recognition of the skyscape of London and the abstraction of black and white patterns spread across the surface of the picture plane.



Fig. 21. John Virtue, *Landscape No. 671*, 2003/2004. Acrylic, shellac & black ink on canvas, 167.6 x 167.6 cm. Annandale Galleries.

To make the work, Virtue developed techniques of applying many layers of marks to build up images in high contrasts of dense blacks against vast areas of brilliant whites. An article in *The Guardian* newspaper, written by journalist Peter Kingston, captures the depth in tone which Virtue was exploring by reporting the occasion of a visit from artist friend Lucien

Freud: "... one evening when Virtue wasn't there. Freud reportedly noted that he could see at least 13 distinct blacks in the paintings" (Kingston 2005).

The pictures bring together the actuality of his subject, inclusive of his embodied experience of the city and skylines, through an abstract formal language to create potent pictures that speak to sensation as much as specific features of a place. Charles Saumarez Smith commented on, "the fear and excitement of megalopolis" evident in Virtue's pictures. "His version of the city," he wrote, "is not concerned with its history, nor its folk memory, nor its mythology, but, instead, he provides an intense visualisation of the remembered experience of particular buildings, of their visual relationship to one another... how it moves: in other words, what he describes as its abstract, visual pattern" (Saumarez Smith et al. 2005, p. 10).

These works of Virtue reference a recognisable sense of place, inclusive of broad open space, embedded with an intensity of the artist's personal self in response to the way he perceives his environment, expressed through densities of tone and different types of mark making.

2.2.2: Miha Štrukelj

In contrast to Virtue, but also exploring tone in his pictures, is Slovenian artist Miha Štrukelj. Štrukelj develops artworks from a fascination for appropriating found images in the media of human tragedies and disasters, such as the Gulf War, the Chernobyl disaster, the bombing of Belgrade in the 1990s and the 9/11 terrorist attacks in America. The artist finds images on the internet and manipulates them by breaking them into fragments using computer-generated software. Martina Vovk (Vovk 2009) describes the appropriation of

images from a computer: "... such media imagery is created in a world where the perception of reality has become loose, as reality, fiction and simulacra are presented at the same time" or such that an overlaying of new meaning is created on top of existing meaning in the disruption that occurs from one process of manipulation to another.

Štrukelj fragments the computer-manipulated imagery further by segmenting it with a grid, drawing each segmented section, before re-layering the segments. The results of this process can be seen in a series of layered collaged drawings he made. Štrukelj built up the final image by isolating different parts of a found image on several layers of transparency paper with each layer depicting different discrete elements, objects or figures within the scene.

Each individual opaque layer of transparency paper, features an element of the isolated imagery from the scene, and is drawn on in black. Upon completion of each drawn transparency, they are brought together and layered one on top of the other, to form the final



Fig. 22. Miha Štrukelj, *Prince Street*, 2009. Marker on tracing paper, 44 x 56 cm. Galerija Škuc 2.

work. The layering of each opaque transparency underneath the top transparency causes a reduction and at times obliteration of detail in each of the underlying layers similar to the effect of an environment when consumed by fog. The black marks of the drawing on each transparency, apart from the top layer, diminish into much softer tones of grey altering the pictorial space of the source imagery. Some of the objects depicted in the images appear as

ghostly fragments, displaced and isolated from each other, and a tension between the real and the fictional emerges.

The altering of the spaces between things in his images, as a way to manipulate and distort space and the form of place, addresses ambiguous space in the ghosted impressions of those things. Štrukelj says of this effect, "I am drawn to ... the confines of a space (in the sense of both physical space of the canvas or other support medium, and geographical space) ... In between there are empty and forgotten spaces. I am especially interested in space [that] is not inhabited with content, but is somewhere in-between" (Štrukelj). The subduing or 'somewhere in-between' effect, is akin to acknowledging Husserl's 'second level' of seeing, where presences and absences of an experience of a place contribute to the image. Štrukelj strips away and empties detail from his images, altering the elements of the place, conjuring qualities of absence reminiscent of the void.

This void-like atmosphere is evident in the dislocated relationship of the figures of human beings juxtaposed against the locations they inhabit. There is power in the void in these works as the atmosphere conjures a sense of memory and trace²² of the event depicted. Like Turcot, Štrukelj's spatial dynamics re-examine the potential explored by Cézanne where the twofold presence of mark making and the representation of objects compete for visual attention.

²² Trace, as noted by Sean Lowry, represents, "the erratic dynamic of creation and destruction, presence and absence" (Lowry 2014). Michael Newman notes, remembering, "rather than simply repeating something fixed, yields the contingency of the trace, attributing potentiality to it once again. We don't necessarily have to know the origin of the trace, since memory is also reconstruction" (Farr 2012, p. 110). Both of these processes occur in Štrukelj's manipulations of technology; disrupting and displacing fragments of things, which in the final image combine through layers and mark making as an artwork.

2.2.3: Frank Auerbach

Of interest in the drawings of German born, British based, artist Frank Auerbach is his process of making marks and erasure with charcoal, which he uses to rigorously examine and record the appearance of something. With some of these drawings, he will go through the process of making marks and erasing them up to 70 times. Often, he will have to use multiple sheets of paper bonded together because the erased surface has deteriorated through the paper. Art critic Robert Hughes wrote of the process as revealing “the ghosts of eraser ‘in’ the sheet contributing some pressure to the final version, which he [Auerbach] is loathed to lose” (Hughes & Auerbach 1990, p. 198). The resulting pictures are a melding of multiple experiences manifest in the layers of distorted pentimento.

For Auerbach, the thing he draws, appears and disappears over and over again. Traces of marks remain. The thing he draws is obliterated, brought back, and reformed in response to the differences he acknowledges within each sitting. His drawings reveal and negate the presence of what is being drawn. Images activate as ghosts of memories. Evidence of the remembrance and forgetting of his experiences combine as they build and are erased layer upon layer.

Marc Augé, in his book *Oblivion*, ponders, “without forgetting there is no space left by which to navigate the meaning of what one has remembered” (Augé 2004, p. VIII). If we are unable to forget, our minds would be overcrowded with experiences and memories and we would never be able to clearly observe properly beyond the multiple layers of each.

If we consider our minds not being able to forget, then Auerbach's drawings, after 70 sittings, would be a solid mass of dense lines without any structured erasure. For Augé, and Auerbach, "... what is interesting is that which remains" (Augé 2004, p. IX). The remaining fragments of memories is what remains of the erased traces of experience in Auerbach's work. Augé suggests this holds "signs of the absence" of experience (Augé 2004, p. IX). Auerbach's pictures navigate both the traces of presence and absence of experience. They simultaneously hold onto and release moments or traces of experience only to allow other moments to come forth and in places be released again.



Fig. 23. Frank Auerbach, *Head of Catherine Lampert VI*, 1979-80. Charcoal and chalk on paper, 77.2 x 58.4 cm, Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York

There is a tension that presents a void-like gap in my mind when I consider Auerbach's process, in what might remain as a trace and what is or has been forgotten or erased. Pierre Nora ponders this by stating the "whole dynamic of our relation to the past is shaped by the subtle interplay between the inaccessible and the non-existent" (Nora 1996, pp. 4-5). Auerbach's drawings suggest this type of inaccessibility. They combine the intrinsic qualities of the mark, working against the next mark or erased trace or blank space, to speculatively define a subject. It is a delicate reciprocity between the representation of the remembered

thing and the forgetting of it.

2.3: Into the void – Courbet, Serra, Kapoor

2.3.1: Gustave Courbet

In 1844, French artist Gustave Courbet made a portrait of himself titled *The Man Made Mad with Fear*. It is an extraordinarily enigmatic image combining blank void-like space with representational images of himself and a landscape. Like Turcot's drawing *Beguine* explored previously, there are sections of Courbet's picture that appear contradictory. The majority of the pictorial space of the painting is taken up by the frontal depiction of the portrait and figure of Courbet falling, or leaping out towards the viewer. In the picture, the leaping Courbet has his legs bent awkwardly, his right-hand projects forward whilst his left hand holds the hair off his face, which has a distinct startled expression.

Behind the leaping artist, in the background, is blue sky with some small clouds and a few trees and mountains in the far distance. But the bottom right of the canvas suggests something else. This section of the painting features what appears to be randomly placed patches of flat green paint, similar to the colour in the background landscape. Next to this, in the bottom right-hand corner, the canvas is white. The flat patches of green and white clash with the illusion of a receding landscape in the remainder of the painting.

When viewing this painting, it appears that the painted figure and portrait of Courbet is about to fall out off a cliff edge and into the blank void of the canvas below, but it also feels as if he is falling out of the picture. The sense of shock on his face is doubled in the sense of shock and uncertainty as the two types of pictorial surfaces clash – both flat abstract void-like space next to the deep descriptive receding



Fig. 24. Gustave Courbet, *The Man Made Mad with Fear*, 1843-44. Oil on paper mounted on canvas, 61 × 91.4 cm. National Gallery of Norway.

“Courbet may well be anticipating the

anti-illusionistic tradition that leads to abstraction, his ‘realism’ hence calling attention not only to contemporary life but also to the flat surface of a painting" (Cone 2008). The painting conjures unusual spaces that can at once be defined – formally – but is also disruptive of conventional descriptive elements. The image suggests a materialisation of the void in the way it brings together the ambiguous foreground spaces, the landscape, and the embodied artist. The three elements – shock, fear and the unknown – combine in the shocked looking face of the artist, the madness reminiscent of fear as the title suggests and perhaps of the unknown void located within.



Fig. 25. Gustave Courbet, *The Source of the Loue*, 1863. Oil on canvas, 84 x 107 cm. Kunsthhaus Zürich.

In another of Courbet's works, which he painted as a series collectively known as *The Source of the Loue*, we see a different type of void-like space emerging. In comparison to *The Man Made Mad with Fear*, there are two important differences. First, there are no or only a minimal presence of people, and second, the landscape is depicted with no horizon. Charles Harrison suggests the effect of the latter point in landscape art disorientates and flattens an image as it interrupts naturalism by producing an effect of containment (Harrison 1994, pp. 219-221). However, in Courbet's *The Source of the Loue*, I don't necessarily think this is the case. In the centre of Courbet's paintings, the viewer sees the entrance to two dark caves surrounded by vertical rock faces with water emanating from the cave entrances towards the bottom of the picture plane. The flow of water suggests movement in the pictures

towards the point of view of the beholder. The lack of horizon serves to frame the ambiguous space of the cave and produces only a minor containment effect. Rather, the way Courbet has painted the cliffs and water leaking out towards the viewer against the interior darkness of the caves, creates a spatial dynamic. Spatial perspective is both emanating and receding. The image of rock and water emanates outwards towards the viewer, whereas the flat black dark areas of the interior of the cave, characteristic of the dark mysterious void, recedes. As James Gibson emphasises, on the one side the picture reveals; "potential collision, and on the other potential passage" (Casey 2014)²³.

Further to the functioning of landscape art with a lack of horizon, Stoichita proposes that landscape images without a horizon are not landscapes at all. Rather they are more likely to be read as images that formally register the marks made on an artworks surface, as abstract or metaphysical, or as pure painting or drawing (Stoichita 1997, p. 107). Stoichita's proposition is not so clear in Courbet's work, but it does resonate with the other pictures I examine further on, where the recognisable image of things exist in some shape or form, working in tandem with the identification of the marks made to picture it.

2.3.2: Richard Serra

American artist, Richard Serra, engages qualities of the yielding void in his contemporary drawings by emptying them completely of descriptive detail. Serra's large-scale drawings consist of densely worked areas of almost complete darkness, or black, onto a monotone

²³ JJ. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*, 1979 (Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1986), in (Casey 2014, p. 308)

surface of grey or white, with at times only very minor amounts of background surface left unworked.

Essentially, the space in these works is abstract. Sontag's fullness in emptiness resonates in the presence of the black content-less material space. Serra once referred to these works as "anti-environments" with "the potential to create its own place and space and to work in contradiction to the spaces and places where it is created... to divide or declare its own area" (Serra 1994, p. 100). This is a similar effect to the function of the flat black darkness of the cave entrances in Courbet's *The Source of the Loue*.

Serra's works reference the early twentieth century history of the emptying of content in the visual arts that goes back to Russian artist Kazimir Malevich's monochrome spatial voids – his *Black Square* paintings of 1915 and his *White on White* paintings of 1918 (Art 1998). Serra's drawings, like that of Malevich, although minimal and abstract in content, exude physicality and "materiality" (Bois, Krauss & Centre

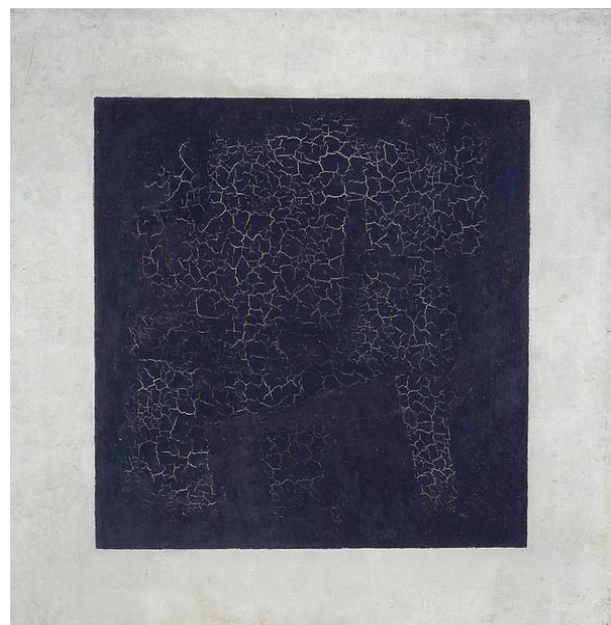


Fig. 26. Kazimir Malevich, *Black Square*, 1915. Oil on linen canvas, 79.5 x 79.5 cm. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow.

Georges Pompidou. 1997, p. 59). This is evident in Serra's work in the interaction of marks that he makes from the physical trace of his dragging large home-made charcoal bricks across the surface of the massive sheets of paper, sized to the specifications of the space, or galleries dimensions of where the work is to be shown.

In Serra's 1989 work titled *The American Flag is not an object of worship*, there is a subtle off-centering of two large black sections of the work made by the trace of white on the surface background left in the centre of the picture plane.

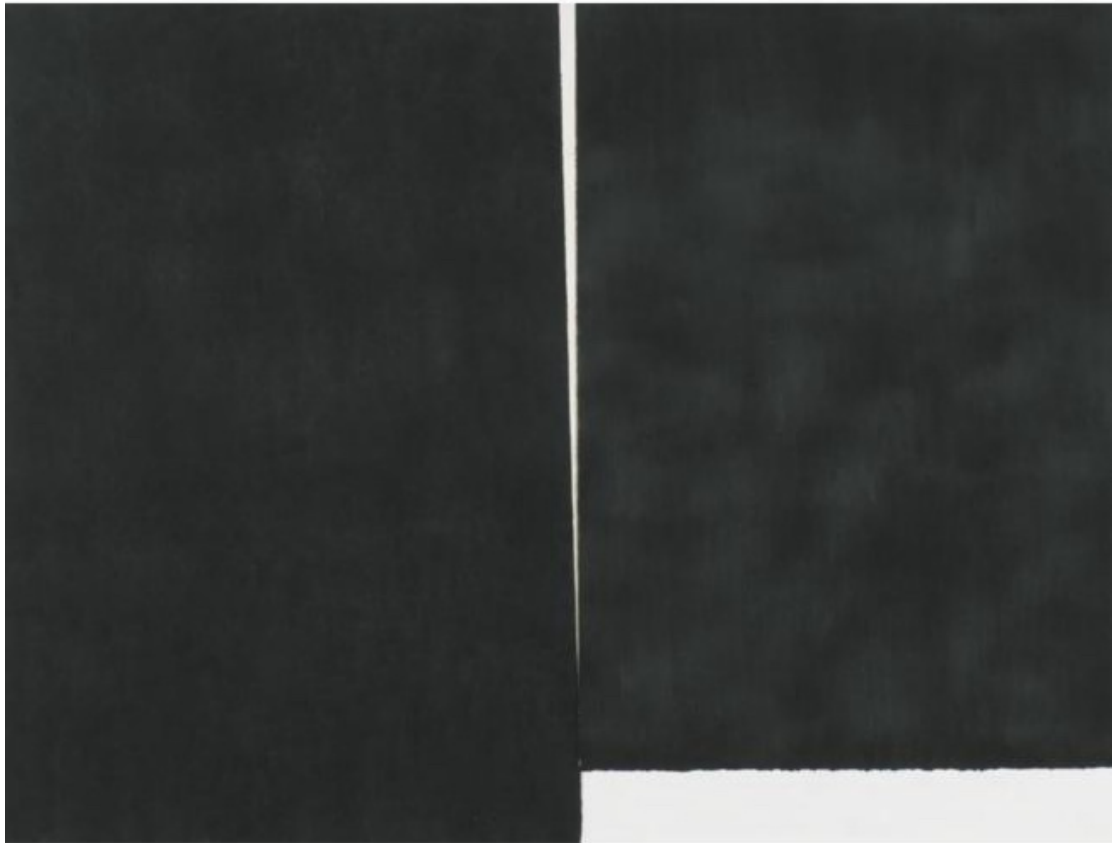


Fig. 27. Richard Serra, *The American Flag is not an object of worship*, 1989. Paintstick on paper, 288 x 376 cm.
Location unknown.

The off-centered white creates a wedge shape that recedes in width as it progresses down to the bottom of the picture plane. Here, the two black sections gently touch, creating a sharp and pointy white wedge between these areas of the picture. This splits the overall image with a further disjuncture occurring, because the right-hand black section is shorter than the left. Thus, another type of wedge, one that shifts the way the work seems to deny gravity, is implied. The wedges, Rosalind Krauss suggests, activate in a similar fashion to the cut in a film – where there is a specific change from one scene to the next (Krauss, RE 2010,

Perpetual inventory, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass. P144). The cuts are deviations that physically divide different surfaces, creating linear boundaries and edges.

Bernice Rose, in her book *Richard Serra: Drawing*, acknowledges the pictorial developments made by Cézanne, as well as artists' Georges Seurat and Claude Monet, as important to Serra's work. She writes of them as those "whom first tore apart and reformed the visual world as a form of re-siting of vision from motif to means" (Garrels, Rose & White 2011, p. 42). Perhaps Courbet's *The Man Made Mad with Fear* is another.

Rose also discusses the significance of photography on Serra (and Seurat and Monet) and in particular considers Seurat's artistic vision as a jump off point for Serra, "not just for framing but, much more significantly for his realisation that the

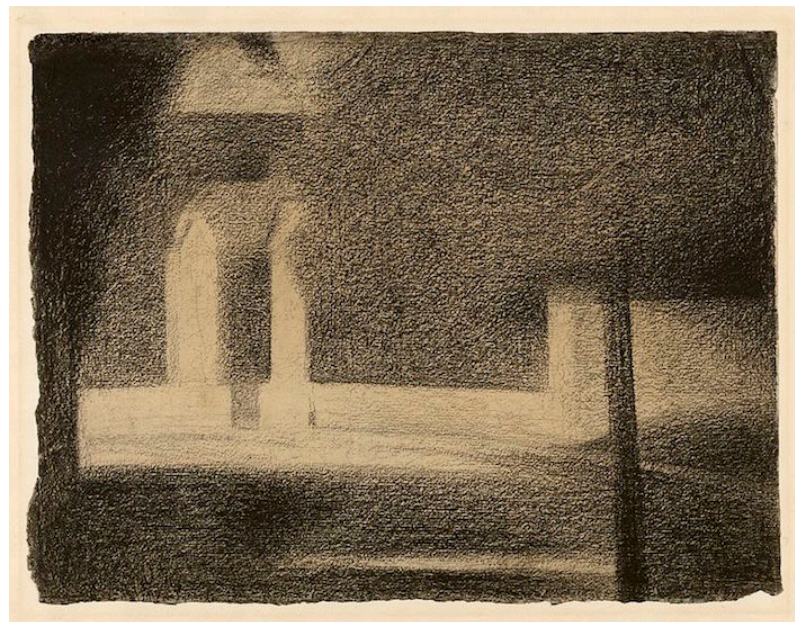


Fig. 28. Georges Seurat, *The Gateway*, 1882-84. Conté crayon on paper, 24.8 × 32.4 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation.

quasi-alchemical accretion – the massing of black notes to exclude light, the varying weights of darkness – is what produces the image of a photograph... Seurat understands and borrows [this], interposing the impersonal and mechanical eye of an apparatus between art and artist and, most importantly, creating the work of art as a field of organised sensations" (Garrels, Rose & White 2011, p. 43). Serra's dense black works encompass the essence of

what Rose refers to as a ‘field of organised sensations’, as do McKeever’s works in their own unique way. But Serra’s works hover in their fullness in abstract space.

2.3.3: Anish Kapoor

Since the 1980s, Indian-English contemporary artist Anish Kapoor has explored qualities of darkness and void in his sculptural and installation based works. For example, in Kapoor’s 1989 work *Void Field*, he manifests uncertainties of the void by making small holes filled with black powdered pigment in large square sandstone blocks of rock. The work’s weighty heaviness is contrasted by the small black void-like spaces. Kapoor suggests they are “weightless, volume-less, ephemeral; it is really turning stone into sky” (Levy 2006, p. 182).

In my twenties, I would visit this work at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and I recall my own awareness of the experience. I remember being effected by the works tactile sensuous materiality registered by observing, on the one hand, the bold heavy organic structure of the rock, and, on the other, by a feeling of emptiness and hollowness within.



Fig. 29. Anish Kapoor, *Void Field*, 1989. Installation, four blocks of Northumbrian sandstone and pigment, dimensions variable. Art Gallery of New South Wales.

These feelings are conjured by what Kapoor defines as the work’s dark “negative, interior form” (Baume 2008). These forms are not infinite, they are finite; yet they are also metaphysical and imaginative, as well as mute in their “signification of emptiness” (Bhabha 1998). The surface qualities of the work suggest both physical presence and absence where

materiality (rock) and immateriality (experience and imagination) transition, combine and vacillate. Homi Bhabha suggests this is where a third type of spatial form exists, “a transitional space, an in-between space” (Bhabha 1998), a space conditioned in the void.

"The void has many presences,"²⁴ Kapoor once said in an interview with Germano Celant (Celant 1996). Many years later, in an interview with Majorie Allthorpe-Guyton, he restated but with more definition that the void “is potential space, not a non-space” (Morley 2010, p. 91). Primarily, Kapoor’s interest in the void stems from the interaction that occurs between the objects he makes and the self. Kapoor likens the void to fear of the unknown in relation to the “body, cave and womb,” as well as vertigo and being “pulled inwards” (Celant 1996, p. 34). Darkness for Kapoor is the visual manifestation of the internal mysterious presence of the self. This is how he gives the void shape. When experienced in a work such as *Void Field*, the organic material substance of rock activates in contrast to the void, implied by the ambiguous dark inner space. A ‘force field’ (Adajania 2010) of the barely graspable ‘aura’ (Bhabha 1998) reminiscent of Mark Levy’s ‘active energy field’ of the void is manifest. Black negative spaces hover and hum against the physicality of the rocky objects with weight and gravity.

Examined variations of experiences between artist and subject matter, through expressive types of mark making, contrasts in tone and erasure, and with the use of technology such as computers and photography, provide a range of processes and techniques to build on in my

²⁴ In other works, Kapoor motions towards the void by using double mirrors and concave mirrors, negative spaces, light and ruptures such as wounds and tears, and more recently with a nano-technology product known as Vantablack, the blackest black ever created that absorbs 99.96% of light into its surface. Cited on the UK Surrey NanoSystems website: <<https://www.surreynanosystems.com/vantablack>> 21 August 2017

own practice. Concepts, such as manifesting immaterial states of mind through speculative mark making, memory as the erased trace of a thing, and the spatial qualities of negation and ambiguity, each present subtle variations of the void. Expanding on the latter notion, I will examine one more artist, a film maker, who implies a different dynamic in the existential psychological spaces of his art.

2.4: Tensions of space – Antonioni

Sam Rohdie, in his book about Italian filmmaker Michelangelo Antonioni, illuminates the way Antonioni explores the psychological effect of landscape, “to create an atmosphere of uncertainty and fragility” (Rohdie 1990, p. 26) where figures take “shape and lose shape” (Rohdie 1990, p. 40). The way things are shaped and lose shape, both physically and psychologically, by means of modelling interactions between a landscape and a character’s psychological temperament is crucial to Antonioni’s cinematic aesthetic. In this section of the chapter, my aim is to expose a number of ways Antonioni integrates this into his films.

My curiosity in Antonioni’s films stems from a life-long interest in the pictorial qualities of film, particularly slow film²⁵ where the emotive or psychological depth of a character is explored in detail. What I find unique about Antonioni, is the way he breaks down spaces and places, at times utterly disintegrating them, in the externalisation of the disturbances of the emotional existential characteristics being portrayed – such as identity, neurosis, depression, loss, and boredom.²⁶ Rohdie writes: “The places are real but unstable. The

²⁵ Slow film, or *Slow Movies* as Ira Jaffe wrote, is a film that does not speed ‘from one plot point to another’, instead it retards motion and prolongs ‘moments of stillness and emptiness’ (Jaffe 2014, pp. 1-3).

²⁶ Antonioni was not the only filmmaker to experiment with these sorts of ideas and methods. Earlier filmmakers such as Japanese Yasujiro Ozu and Swedish Ingmar Bergman also captured these qualities in their own unique way – Ozu was known for his long takes of silence, and Bergman, for analysing through film the psychological depth of the human character.

interest is not with this instability, nor these losses of place, but rather with the productivity of that instability, the new shapes, the new stories, the new, temporary, subjects which they permit" (Rohdie 1990, p. 2).

Without discussing the complexities of Antonioni's narratives or narrative structures, I find the formal strength of Antonioni's films lies in elements of disunity. He would use obtuse camera angles, shifting perspectives, silence rather than dialogue, and long shots that at times had minimal or no action. He would experiment with alternative tonal values and monochromatic scale, and with blocking and edits which would break and recompose space.²⁷ He would also juxtapose compositions, which would have little to do with each other, perhaps to jolt the image with seemingly unrelated images. Instead they would force a search for another connection, perhaps at a social or metaphysical level.

What I also find of interest in Antonioni's films develops along the lines of Sontag's notion of fullness with emptiness, and emptiness with fullness. His films are not about concrete resolution rather they are an observation of 'surface'²⁸ things both physically and psychologically. Matthew Gandy suggests, Antonioni emphasises "the experience of landscape in human consciousness" (Gandy 2006, p. 316). Whatever the case, Antonioni had an innate ability to tap into the immaterial and reflect its ambiguity in material form through film.

²⁷ He would also stylise the use of pans, dollies, cuts, and reframes, and the close up or enlargement of detail for extra effect.

²⁸ The notion of 'surface' as a method for understanding Antonioni's films is explored at length by Seymour Chatman in his book *Antonioni: or, the surface of the world*. Chatman takes on a phenomenological approach to analysing Antonioni's films, which he theorises as an 'intense concentration on the sheer appearance of things – the surface of the world as he [Antonioni] sees it...' (Chatman 1985, p. 2).

In Antonioni's critically acclaimed 1960 film *L'avventura*, there are, in essence, three different filmic pictorial spaces that are observable. The first are broad and open views of natural landscapes at the beginning of the film, reflecting the general calm and playful mood of the characters. There are many long shots in soft grey tones of broad and sweeping sea and island-scapes. The second type of space occurs after one of the main characters goes missing. Pictorial space and perspective flattens and we start to see many shots of other characters flattened by their close positioning to a more upfront kind of background surface. When this first occurs, the scene is on the edge of a sharp and craggily rocky island-scape bordered by rough seas. The characters seem to merge with the turbulent sea and rock. Spaces are claustrophobic suggesting anxiety in the psychological state of the characters, in particular the missing person's best friend who becomes more and more isolated and trapped as the film develops.



Fig. 30. Michelangelo Antonioni, *L'avventura*, 1960. Screen shot from the film (Antonioni 1960).

The third type of spatial register reoccurs on a number of occasions in the second half of the film – it is one that in the same frame is both open, featuring broad skiescapes looking off to

a horizon, next to a closed and confined space, such as a door or wall, suggesting moments of indecision in the emotional states of the main characters.



Fig. 31. Michelangelo Antonioni, final shot from *L'avventura*, 1960. Screen shot from the film (Antonioni 1960).

Antonioni continued to use these three types of spaces in future films. But, at times, he would add to his repertoire by using other shots (more refined and poignant shots) that would more expressively manipulate pictorial space and add heightened tension within a specific moment or scene of a film.

An excellent example of this occurs in his 1961 film, *La notte*. About a third of the way into the film is a long sequence where the main character, Lidia, who is in a disinterested and anguished frame of mind brought on by a deteriorating relationship with her partner, wanders silently observing the streets of a city.

As Lidia slowly walks, there is no narrative or soundtrack. Viewers are provided only with images to decipher. Lidia walks alone in and around deteriorated buildings. At times, she is

flanked by the receding perspectives of dark and shadowy exterior surfaces of the high-rise city environment juxtaposed against open and distant city streets. The effect is like walking through a tunnel. In contrast, other sequences see Lidia surrounded by people (usually leering men), whilst at others the city is claustrophobic, then open again.²⁹ The contrast of shots also suggests an ambiguous sense of time. The city becomes something of a maze, mysterious, free-flowing and reflective, disorientating the viewer. We can only imagine what she might be thinking.

Midway through the sequence is a striking shot, and which I consider a defining moment of the film. It is a wide shot where the camera is positioned very high above a street corner below. The frame is mostly taken up by a large expanse of concrete wall that rises from the bottom to the top of the frame.

We are viewing the scene from across a narrow street at an odd downward angle which makes the composition sharp, angular, disorientating and abstract. The viewer is jolted to make sense of the composition being viewed.³⁰

²⁹ There are a number of highly suggestive shots within this sequence including; a toddler crying on its own amongst a decrepit building; looking down at a broken clock followed by a close up of Lydia's hand peeling away a piece of rusted metal from a wall; her detached observation of other people as she looks at them through reflective glass windows; a striking camera angle from behind that captures her reflection in the glass of an office building (suggesting self-reflection); and a fight that she comes across between a group of young men followed by a scene with a bunch of different young men shooting rockets into the air. There are a number of shots throughout this sequence where, upon her observation of men going about their business, she is not reciprocated the same detached observation from them, rather what is returned is a probing antagonistic leering glare – this is reminiscent of scenes in *L'avventura* where packs of wild men invade the space of lone women. Each of these shots, in both films, are highly unsettling.

³⁰ The first brief shot of this scene we see, is followed by another brief shot of a mid/close up Lydia's husband lying down alone on a couch in a dark and claustrophobic room in their apartment. The husband looks over towards the window next to him before the shot cuts again to the unusual view of the building and street corner. The contrast from close up and dark to long exterior shot in various softer tones of greys and white with distance at a downward angle is striking.



Fig. 32. Michelangelo Antonioni, *La Notte*, 1961. Screen shot from the film (Antonioni 1961).

After a few moments, Lidia appears at the very bottom left of frame. She is tiny and utterly consumed by the composition of the concrete building. Her presence immediately attracts the eye in the strange composition. The action lasts only a few seconds – she walks around the corner perimeter of the building before the frame cuts to another shot. The sharp angle looking down on the building and the distorted abstracted viewpoint of space accentuate her overwhelmed, seemingly confused and unresolved mood.

The scene is reminiscent of *Dancer on the Stage* (1878), a painting by Edgar Degas, in which the viewer looks down onto a stage in a theatre with a dancer on it. The unusual angle of the painting, with its high viewpoint, disrupts the verticalisation and horizontality of the ground, yet, as French thinker Paul Valéry noted, it does not trouble the unity of the represented scene (Bois, Krauss & Centre Georges Pompidou. 1997, p. 27). Likewise, in *La notte*, after the initial pictorial confusion is verified by Lidia entering the scene, unity is

restored, albeit in a disconcerting fashion. A heightened and altered awareness of her integration with the landscape is apparent.

In Antonioni's next film, *L'eclisse*, storytelling with pictorial form is further refined. There are two particular scenes, which relate to each other, both with dynamic and suggestive qualities that merge the main character's psychological temperament with the setting they are in. The scenes occur in a stock exchange, and as the eight-minute ending in an urban landscape. The scenes are linked in the way they suggest resolution of the film.

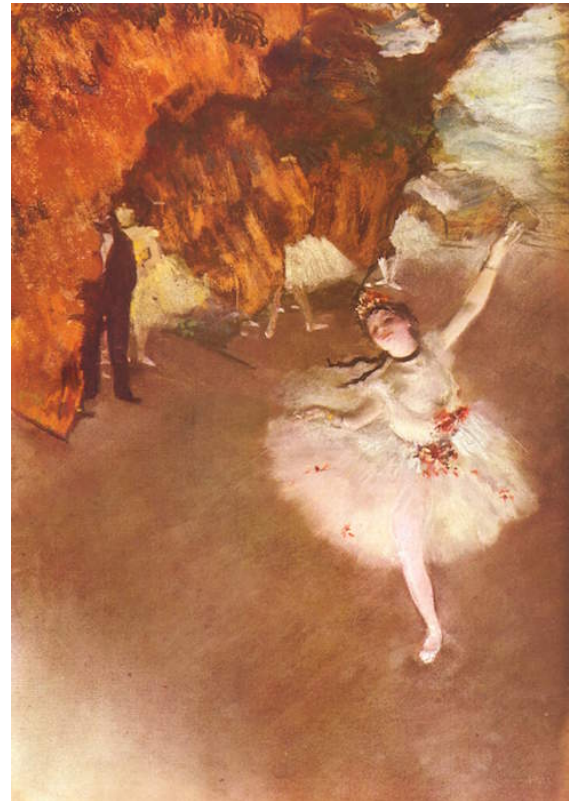


Fig. 33. Edgar Degas, *Dancer on the stage*, 1876-77. Pastel on paper, 44 x 60 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

In the first of the two scenes, the main character, Vittoria visits a stock exchange. It's an overwhelmingly chaotic male dominated environment, men scream, shout and gesture furiously at each other like wild beasts. Vittoria soon meets Piero, a stockbroker. Within this sequence there is one particular shot that suggests what is to come – of a relationship that develops between Vittoria and Piero and how it and the film ends. There is a period in the scene where the chaos of the stock exchange pauses for a moment's silence. When this occurs, the shot shows half of Vittoria's body on the left of frame. To the right of her, blocking the other half of her body, is a large expanse of a concrete pylon. The pylon takes up more than half of the frame separating the space between her and Piero – whose body is also half framed but on the other side of the pylon.



Fig. 34. Michelangelo Antonioni, *L'eclisse*, 1961. Screen shot from the film (Antonioni 1962).

The shot is reminiscent of Lidia in *La notte*, but, in *L'eclisse*, the main difference is that it at once seems to connect the two characters as well as separate them.³¹ Author Dominique Nasta refers to this space as an “abyss” (Nasta 1991, p. 136) between the two characters. I consider this shot develops the central premise of the film, as it forewarns, as well as mirrors, the tensions that occur between the two characters.

Shortly after the long stock exchange scene, Piero seduces Vittoria and throughout the remainder of the film they see each other regularly, but there is always implied tension.³² Towards the end of the film, we hear Vittoria and Piero decide that they will meet at a location that we (the viewers) have seen them wandering around earlier in the film. It's an urban streetscape where new low-rise apartment or office buildings are being constructed. The streets are wide and it's a modern location. In the final sequence of shots, Antonioni

³¹ Rather than as an external expanse of concrete reflecting the internal anxiety of the character of Lidia in *La notte*.

³² For example, Vittoria has reservations having recently parted ways from her boyfriend Riccardo. There is tension at the stock exchange when it crashes and Vittoria's mother loses everything, and there is tension in other scenes when Piero attempts to make love to her and Vittoria resists. Antonioni controls the framing of these scenes with alternative camera angles and off-centre positioning of focal points in shots, he exploits the use of both deep and claustrophobic spaces, and again includes many slow and meandering scenes reflecting the character's melancholy as they wander around interior or exterior spaces.

shows us details of the surfaces of this location with the same camera angles from earlier in the film, this time without Vittoria and Piero in the scene. Neither of them shows up to meet the other. Antonino adds other shots, such as a shadow across a road, the corner of a random building, and a silhouette of a lone tree. The camera simply observes and explores. Occasionally Antonioni places the camera behind someone and we think it is either Vittoria or Piero about to meet, but none of these people turn out to be who we are anticipating to see. After eight minutes, it is dusk, the street lights come on, nothing more happens and the film ends.

Antonioni resolves, or rather dissolves, the relationship with a 'lack'³³ of emotion from the two characters. The sequence of shots, Rohdie suggests, is the presence of "emptiness, hence the trace and feel of absence" (Rohdie 1990, p. 172). To manifest this Antonioni uses silence (there is no musical soundtrack, just sounds of ambient life) contrasted against the appearance of empty wide and open spaces and close ups. The expanse of concrete wall in the earlier stock exchange scene similarly reflects the emotive presence of absence, as blank space at the end of the film. Sontag's fullness of emptiness is on display, as is Sartre's notion of nothingness – when he is searching for his friend who isn't there in a café. These qualities are manifest in Antonioni's vision of the urban landscape becoming ground, devoid of the figures that we as viewers are seeking. A desolate void-like psychological space of emptiness and nothingness is implied.

³³ Writer Dominique Nasta suggests that the ending, rather than being about emptiness and nothing, is about the lack of things occurring emotionally between the two characters (Nasta 1991, p. 143).

In his films, Antonioni manages the implied psychological spaces of the characters by dynamically positioning them, or eliminating them, in atmospheric locations reflective of their circumstances. Implication involves us and we become an integral part of making meaning from the silences and uncertainties that occur. Authors Burch and Heath suggest Antonioni's films present relationships occurring both on and off the screen. They "push against [the] edges" (Konstantarakos 2000, p. 108) of the frame of the film. This is implied formally by the uncertainties that are as much full as they are empty, where deep and shallow space often occurs in the one shot; with broad long shots as well as confined and claustrophobic close ups. Additional tension is created by separating things and characters in space.³⁴

The artists surveyed above invoke a rich platform of enquiry into exploring and synthesising a wide variety of methods and processes of visual mark making in relation to representing existential psychological elements of the places/spaces or events they experience. An exchange of multi-sensory experience occurs in the personality of their artworks, between the things observed in the world and the way these things are observed.

I commenced this project exploring the marks and pictorial spaces of the works of Paul Cézanne and Francisco Goya. In particular, I initially engaged with what I considered to be pictorial disturbances in their work. For example, I focused on where I considered a thing to be depicted with expressive forms of mark making but not always fully articulated. In the

³⁴ Antonioni also uses mirrors and reflections, by framing the action off-centre and with obtuse angles, as well as starting or concluding the action of a scene at or beyond the edge.

example of Cézanne, marks and blank spaces are read individually but they also interact to create sensations of the presence (and where there was blank space, absence) of the artist's observation of the world.

In Cézanne's work, particularly his later work, he developed a unique sense of responding to his phenomenologic observation of things, inclusive of his own subtle but meaningful shifts in the perspective of the thing as he was observing, through the types of marks he made.

Cézanne's attempt was to aim for clarity in his translation of the observations of the way he consciously experienced things, not only through visual perception but perhaps also factoring his own emotional self at the time of observing. His perceptions are embedded into the work with variety in the types of marks he made. For Cézanne, working this way developed intensities in the mark making, as shifts and mutations of the representative qualities of the thing being drawn, characterising the existential nature of his experience.

The marks characterised the types of landscapes being portrayed where each mark's meaningful placement on the picture plane contributed to the making of an overall image of something, as well as activating the sensation of a mark as a single abstract entity.

With Goya, this two-way sensation in his artworks is accentuated by the way he made images of violent scenes with energetic and violent types of mark making. Embedding these types of methods of mark making into my work involves phenomenologic observation of rock forms, noting a rock formation's tumultuous beginning and its slow yet powerfully evocative evolution along with the expressive experiential qualities.

Following my examination of Cézanne and Goya, I then explored two contemporary artists, John Virtue and Miha Štrukelj, who were also making artworks derived from different types

of experience with subject matter derived from landscape. Of initial interest was the way they worked with variations of tone. For Virtue, it was with many layers of black and white, a process that incorporates layers suggestive of a depth of time and memory relevant to the location he is working within. Whereas with Štrukelj – built up images with layers of transparency paper to develop different subtle ranges of tonal variation. The resulting images read as layers of fading tone, and as a type of ghostly erasure, suggestive of both the presence and absence of the locations being depicted.

Tone, as used by both of these artists, shifts the resemblance of a landscape location being depicted, producing dynamic sensations of the things being drawn, to a point where these things, at times, verge on abstraction.

It became increasingly evident after my initial engagement with the artworks of Cézanne, Goya, Virtue and Štrukelj that different types of pictorial spaces were emerging. Marks were being read both individually (as abstract sensations) and together to form images. Blank and monochromatic treatment of broad spaces were read in a similar way – as defining images of things and yet at other times as nothing but fields of flat tone. These sensations provoked my thinking about the in between spaces, or the border, boundary or edge where these zones activate. A dialogue of space, emptiness and negation in relation to the presences and absences of things being portrayed was provoked. In my own experience, I began to explore this as gaps in the way I observed physical things as perceived in reality. The exploration included incorporating the way these things were felt and the broader gaps that appeared in the process of remembering and forgetting, and how this could be incorporated into the making of images with marks and tone on a pictorial surface.

This led to an examination of the void, as a concept underpinning these ideas, and an alternative investigation into its qualities with mark making, tone and space. For example, in Richard Serra's mostly flat monochromatic black drawings, the void was found in depictions of flat black space as a type of fullness in emptiness. It was also found in Gustave Courbet's dark shadowy cave entrances in his series of paintings *The Source of the Loue*. In these works, blackness yields to create deep ambiguous spaces. Whilst in Anish Kapoor's three-dimensional sculptural works, the void conjures negative space, created by the artist with qualities of empty space and ambiguous material weight. A conceptual type of presence and absence emerges in the juxtaposition of rock forms and empty space.

The notions of negative space and absence provoked certain qualities of the void, and progressed the inquiry towards an examination of the void as blank and flat space, in opposition to yielding monochromatic black space. I initially explored Gustave Courbet's painting, *The Man Made Mad by Fear*, followed by a series of drawings by Frank Auerbach that used significant amounts of erasure. In Courbet's painting, blank space was incorporated into the composition of the picture to juxtapose against the recognition of a realistically depicted landscape and a self-portrait of Courbet on the surface of the canvas. The empty space activates as a flat ambiguous void-like zone in the overall scheme of the picture. Courbet interacts with this zone of the picture by positioning a portrait of himself leaping out over it. Flatness and abstraction combine with the portrait and the landscape in a jolting and unsettling manner characterising the existential psychology of the artist in his artwork.

Frank Auerbach's process driven drawings in contrast made by making marks and erasing them many times over, refers to both the presence and absence of the things being drawn. Robert Hughes wrote of the process suggesting that the essence of Auerbach's work "lies in the relation of one mark to another, not the general address of all marks to the motif: *disegno interno*, the expressive internal relations of drawing, the 'harmony', as distinct from *disegno esterno*, fidelity to likeness." Hughes could also be writing of Cézanne, Goya, Štrkelj and Courbet's *The Man Made Mad by Fear*, where the relationship of individual marks and the overall design of a work function with and against each other. Neither dominates, nor is submissive or passive to the other. Yet, as Homi Bhabha suggests, a third spatial form is implied, "a transitional space, an in-between space" (Bhabha 1998), a space in which the ambiguous void is agitated.

The 'transitional, in-between space' as referred to by Bhabha, lead my inquiry to an examination of two further artists, Susan Turcot and Ian McKeever. I was conscious of exploring the way different types of mark making and pictorial spaces were able to signify elements of the notion of void relative to the inner emotive self. In Turcot, the scribbles she made, juxtaposed with realistically drawn depictions of landscapes, produced both images of things and abstractions, suggesting, as the third void-like 'in-between' space, the artist's inner emotive thinking embedded into the work. Whereas McKeever's layered drawn and photographic marks spoke in a more objective manner. When juxtaposed together, these marks suggest differences in perceptions occurring when capturing the same experience but through different forms of mark making. The effect is similar to differences in memory that occur in the consciousness of a thing at a later date.

The two types of 'in-between' spaces produced by each artist, of inner emotion and of difference, suggest further evidence of the void activating as presences and absences of a thing through different types of mark making and as conceptual and spatial provocations.

Finally, crucial to exploring alternative types of spatial relationships of landscapes, which evoke disturbances and void-like qualities, was in the formal disunities I had seen in the films of Michelangelo Antonioni. Over the course of the project I re-watched most of his films, carefully focusing on the locations and the existential relationships of those locations to the characters inhabiting them. In the films, void-like spaces and gaps are perceived as shifting perspectives of view, by re-composing, with blocking, and with empty spaces where no action or nothing occurs. These forms are fragile in relation to the development of Antonioni's cinematic narrative (or the content of the work). Yet they are used by Antonioni to develop deeper perhaps metaphysical types of thinking and meaning about what is occurring. They imply relationships, some stronger than others, of the characters with the spaces and locations they appear in, and in doing so develop the existential emotional charge of the films.

With the drawings I made during this project, meaning is incorporated through phenomenological embodiment of experiential knowledge. I grappled with the void as observed in the perceived sensations at the sites that I worked in. The implications of this, relative to the findings of the artist's work I have explored in this chapter, provides my practice with a broad reservoir of ideas, techniques and processes to base making artworks with qualities of recognising, experiencing and agitating the void.

Chapter 3: Shifting perspectives

This chapter is structured with two sections. It begins with a review of the governing methodologies and strategies in relation to the research aims and objectives and to the theoretical sphere. I have visited and studied, as source material and subject matter, four sites in three countries. The sites are: the lonely and isolated sentinel of Tasman Island located off the southeast coast of Tasmania; the dark and brooding Bond Store basement, an historical building incorporated into the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, in my home town of Hobart, Tasmania; the steep and precarious Gorge du Cians in Southern France; and the distinctive crimson coloured monument that is Cathedral Rock in Sedona, Arizona, in the United States of America. I chose each site for the specific qualities and features of their rock forms as they offered fruitful paths for investigation into the challenges of picturing the void.

In my drawings, qualities of the void are developed as spatial concerns manifest as areas of dark or light, or as loose speculative and repetitive scribbly forms. I represent the void as drawn images of the gaps between rock forms, as blank underworked spaces, or as mutations formed by the layering and/or erasing of redrawn sketches.

The phenomenologic enquiry, the theory I use to engage with and analyse personal experiences, informs discussion of site where the qualities of geology, my emotion (observing intense emotive states) and the sites ambience are perceived and recorded. The recorded qualities of experience are taken into my studio. The studio is central to

illuminating the effect of memory, as it is in the studio where each experience is remembered. Within this there is an acknowledgment that memories alter and mutate, and where elements of experience are forgotten. I express the latter qualities in the drawings with erasure and as blank or underworked spaces on the picture plane.

Throughout the first section of this chapter I analyse and synthesise key elements of the theoretical and artistic contextual field in which the project is based and the effect of these on the decisions made to expand and finesse subject matter and form in the drawings. Important to manifesting, and erasing, appropriate types of marks and pictorial spaces in the images, is picturing the uneasy equilibrium of subject and mark making, or what Robert Hughes' asserts as being the 'second subject of drawing, of drawing as drawing itself' (Hughes & Auerbach 1990, p. 196), where drawing and subject matter is on edge, where it quivers, hums and reverberates between sensation and representation.

The second part of the chapter looks in detail at the techniques and media that were developed in the studio. I discuss criteria for the selection of imagery for drawing, source image capture (sketching, photography, notes and writing), the use of source material (collage and computer manipulation), and scale, perspective, and viewpoint. Charcoal and paper were employed consistently across all artwork, their use modified according to the differing conditions effecting the gathering of source material and the differing features and conditions of each site. These differences are manifest in techniques of mark-making such as scribbles and tonal variation.

3.1: Drawing: the face of being

“Almost any piece of country includes remnants of former landscapes, as if it were a document with scraps of past history written on it. Some of the earlier notes are obscured by the later, and parts of the record are inevitably missing. All the skill of a logician – or of an amateur detective – is required in the work of decipherment. At times, the task of reconstruction is as formidable as the restoring of a whole film from a single photographic still” (Dury 1963, p. 1).

The above quote, from geomorphologist G. Dury, introduces his book titled *The Face of the Earth*. Dury’s words conjure the complex and mysterious potential when deciphering the internal forces of the earth. I think of drawing in similar terms, as an internal, complex, mysterious force seeking the potential to manifest things and ideas through the quality and quantity of mark making.

During this project, I have sought connections between drawing and the geology I have observed at each site. Drawing reveals the remnants or the traces and layers of the things, moods and atmospheres that I have observed at these sites and manifests their qualities through the act of mark making.

Through careful observation of rocks, and nature in general, the 19th century artist and critic John Ruskin also sought a closer connection and deeper understanding of this subject. In his writings on nature he expresses his whole physical and intellectual being is engaged in the task of observation. Ruskin wrote of this experience as a ‘strange quivering’ and referred on other occasions to the ‘internal spirit’ and ‘energy’ of rocks (Ruskin, VLWaj 1988). In the

following passage, he describes the allure of surface effect as well as the ‘unfathomable’ mysteries contained deep within the material of natural objects.

"As we look farther into it, it is all touched and troubled like waves by a summer breeze; rippled far more delicately than seas or lakes are rippled; they only undulate along their surfaces this rock trembles through its very fibre like the chords of an Aeolian harp – like the stillest air of spring with the echoes of a child's voice. Into the heart of all those great mountains, through every tossing of their boundless crests and deep beneath all their unfathomable defiles, flows that strange quivering of their substance" (Ruskin, J 1897, pp. 486-487).

Like Ruskin, I find the formal characteristics of rock; broad, variable and dynamic. Rock, the smallest pebble or the most immense mountain range, is characterized by immense age. In all we can observe sedimentation and erosion that illustrate millions, if not billions, of years of time and evolution. The rocks, when thought about in this way, conjure vastness and wonder, and a sense of ‘deep time’ as void-like, unfathomable and metaphysical.

On occasion, as I walk through a rocky landscape,

I feel a rock break underfoot. I pause and ponder

how my passage through the landscape contributes to the earth’s evolution through



Fig. 35. John Ruskin, study of *Gneiss Rock, Glenfinlass*, 1853. Pen, brown ink, ink wash (lamp-back) and body colour, 47.7 x 32.7 cm. Ashmolean Museum, England.

erosion. In those moments, I am conscious of the tactile contact between my physical body, mind and the physical rock. It dawns on me that I am a part of the landscape, and part responsible for its reformation by my presence of being within it.

As I closely observe the surface of this newly formed eroded rock, I see intricate and expressive details, and patterns and counteractions of marks and squiggly lines. When drawing these, I am reminded of Husserl's phenomenologic 'reduction' as I interpret the found surface marks through dots, dashes, scribbles and scratches, layered and erased to achieve similar sensations as I observed them out in nature. My mark on nature informs my mark when drawing. Geologist and writer Marcia Bjornerud also deciphers the earth with an approach that integrally links the mind and body to the earth. She writes, "In reading the rock record, we may perhaps anthropomorphize the Earth a little if we also "geomorphize" ourselves, rediscovering the history of the Earth imprinted on us" (Bjornerud 2005, p. 6).

I am influenced by and combine Bjornerud's concept into my thinking when I am alone and/or isolated and looking at rock forms at a site. I use my time observing their forms to slow down and look carefully. To imagine I am one, or at least attempting to get a closer connection with the rock. I notice the small overlooked things, the details, surface tensions, atmospheric silences, and my own psychological and physiological temperament. Each experience is unique. For example, when I researched content for future drawings at the Gorge du Cians I spent less than an hour there and was in the company of another person. Whilst at Cathedral Rock, alone, I stayed for half the day. However, the opportunity to slow down and explore the elements of each experience occurred much later whilst working in my studio through review of the content contained in the collected documentary material I

amassed from each site.

The drawings made of Tasman Island refer to over a decade of past experiences, whereas drawings produced from my experience of the Bond Store come from visiting the site numerous times over a year. The commonality to making all of the drawings from each of the sites is that their content reflects time, with a particular emphasis on the effect of memory.

All of the drawings were made in my studio, after the event of experiencing each site. This process both complements and disrupts the memory of the experience. I was disembodied from the site but embodied in my studio. Svetlana Alpers writes of this condition: “Curious it seems, the person has withdrawn from the world for the purpose of attending better to it” (Alpers 2010, p. 129). As Alpers points out, my time in the studio attempts to make more sense of the experiences I have had in the world, however, my perception of each site whilst in my studio is reconstituted in the form of memory. Memory occurs as: remembering, conjured in my drawings in the representation of the surface elements of the rock forms; and forgetting as evocative of absences, ambiguous space and the void. The latter point acknowledges that an experience conjured at a later date loses some of its initial potency. Within this loss, of conscious experience, lurks the void.

The rock forms I draw relate to the experiencing of material things. Whereas qualities of the void are represented in the subtleties of mark making and in the ambiguities of pictorial space in the work.

The drawn representations of rock forms thus set off the recognition of the void, drawn as dark crevices or sinkholes or as an entrance to a cave, or an underground slot canyon or as dark passageways, or where representative images of rock forms disintegrate or are under-formed. Together, in the drawings, these forms span both figuration and abstraction.

In most of my drawings I have positioned rock forms next to an edge or corner leading into a well-lit or darkened space of some kind. The Bond Store drawings include representations of built rocky structures with areas that lead the eye into passageways or through dark doorways or windows. The Gorge du Cians drawings lead the eye of the viewer through a series of light and dark passageways and pathways in variations of tone built up with line, whilst the Tasman Island and Cathedral Rock drawings position the viewer as one who peers into or out of gaps or openings of caves, canyons and sinkholes.

The gaps in the drawings are ruptures that respond to ruptures in the earth or built environment. They are transition zones from light to dark which I use in my drawings to infer psychological resonances. This relationship actively harnesses Gaston Bachelard's concept whereby the primitive deep dark recesses of our mind resonate between one's inner and outer self



Fig. 36. David Edgar, *delivered*, 2016. Charcoal on paper, 120 x 120 cm.

(Bachelard & Jolas 1994). If I step into a cave or tunnel entrance or through a doorway into a dark room I transition from the light into a consuming darkness and I feel a sense of

containment and of the unknown. A few steps in and I turn around and peer back out onto the luminously bright shiny world outside, framed by the rocky edges of the entrance that I have just walked through. I feel like I have entered into an artwork, or into a framed picture on a gallery wall. I consciously feel an opposite as I ponder the transition in my mind from one form of openness of being in the world, to one that collapses into an unknown mysterious darkness.



Fig. 37. David Edgar, *narrow extremities*, 2015.
Charcoal on paper, 95 x 95 cm. Private collection.



Fig. 38. David Edgar, *deep* (diptych), 2017.
Charcoal on chalkboard paint and gesso on paper, 210 x 220 cm.

Framings and edges are thus consciously incorporated into many of my works. For example, in the drawings *narrow extremities* and *deep*,³⁵ drawn areas of rock forms frame centrally located areas of dark void-like spaces. Peering into the dark spaces is like peering into Tanizaki's world of the dark 'mysterious depths' of the void. His dimly lit shadowy world conjures a cautious and fearful emotive response to darkness, even though he focuses his writing on interior spaces. These powerful emotive effects I explore as shadows of the

³⁵ The work *deep* is divided into two panels. When hung, they sit side by side of each other with a two-centimetre gap between them. Hung away from a wall and dimly lit, the margins and gaps interact to create a variety of shadowy void-like spaces consisting of the darkened marks made on the picture plane and the darkened exhibition space surrounding the work.

natural world as they yield into mysterious, receding or ambiguous spaces.³⁶



Fig. 39. David Edgar, *freak*, 2016. Charcoal on paper, 120 x 120 cm.



Fig. 40. David Edgar, *puzzle*, 2016. Charcoal on paper, 120 x 120 cm.

The opposite occurs in a series of four drawings, titled *freak*, *fruit*, *puzzle*, and *hanging* made in response to Tasman Island. The works isolate sections of rock forms in the centre of the images which are surrounded by flat black backgrounds. The position of the viewer is of one inside the dark spaces, from within the void, rather than outside looking in. From this position, the rock forms seem to emerge out from the darkness towards the viewer.

³⁶ Another example of the occurrence of ambiguous pictorial space is in the drawings titled *ghost* and *fall*. The drawings derive their content from a phenomenon known as ghost buildings. Essentially, the term 'ghost building' refers to what remains on the shared walled surface when one section of a building is removed from another. The remaining sections silhouette the spatial outlines of roof lines, room shapes or doorways, staircases and/or window shapes. The drawings, *ghost* and *fall*, contain images of the ghosted shapes of buildings found on or nearby the exterior walls of the Bond Store building. The ghosted shapes are drawn as flat black areas on the picture plane suggestive of peering into dark shadowy passageways (doorways and windows). The drawn void-like ghosted shapes relate to memory, erosion, vacant space and negation. They are reminiscent of the nothingness Sartre speaks of when he theorizes looking for his friend Pierre in a café. Instead of finding nothing though, shifting perspectives in the figure and ground relationships remain. Pictorially, the dark shapes in the drawings are ambiguous. At times, they suggest deep yielding passageways, whilst others operate visually as flat shapes. The ambiguous forms function in this way because of the shapes of rock forms drawn around them.

Similarly, in the drawing titled *chasm*, the viewer is positioned in the darkness, near the edge of a cave entrance looking out towards the light. The drawing has a containment effect that builds on the pictorial spaces created by Goya's etchings where the outer edges of the picture plane consists of dark forms, creating complexity in understanding whether or not the setting is interior or exterior.³⁷



Fig. 41. David Edgar, *chasm* (diptych), 2017. Charcoal and pastel on chalk board paint & gesso on paper, 210 x 220 cm.

In *chasm*, the void is suggested in three ways, in the light filled space occurring outside of the cave, underneath and to the side of the lit openings where areas of darkness drawn with charcoal soft pastel sticks yield in opposition to the light above, and, when exhibited, in the darkened shadowy space of the gallery occurring in the small vertical gap between the two drawings.³⁸ Viewers, and myself drawing the work, are in the void; we are on the edge or border zone near the light, but are mostly consumed by the darkness of the charcoal, and when exhibited, by the darkness of gallery that surrounds the work.

³⁷ Additional experimentation with edges occurs in my drawings titled *staged scenery*, *narrow extremities*, and *outside II*. In these works, the edges gently merge into the darkness. Whereas in other drawings, for example, *estranged*, *penetrating the origin*, and *locality*, there is a distinctly sharper edge. At times also, some of the dark spaces recede, such as in *penetrating the origin*, whilst others appear flat, such as in the work titled *locality*, suggesting an awkward sense of space verging on abstraction.

³⁸ The drawing is made on pre-prepared paper with two coats of gesso followed by two coats of black chalk board paint. The drawing was made with grey and charcoal soft pastel sticks. The work matched the dimensions of the ceiling height of the Bond Store basement where it was first exhibited in 2017. Each of the two panels were hung away from the wall, creating a dark shadowy space behind them. This gave the impression that they were hovering in space.

An alternative form of framed edge occurs in the drawing titled *remote exertion 2*, a work derived from memories of Tasman Island. In particular, the memories of an awareness of the island's many edges – the boundary between the sea and the cliffs and a wariness of sinkholes on its upper surface. *Remote exertion 2* explores the feeling of being on edge as subject matter through contrasting pictorial sensations. It is a very large drawing, measuring 3 metres in height and over 10 metres in length.

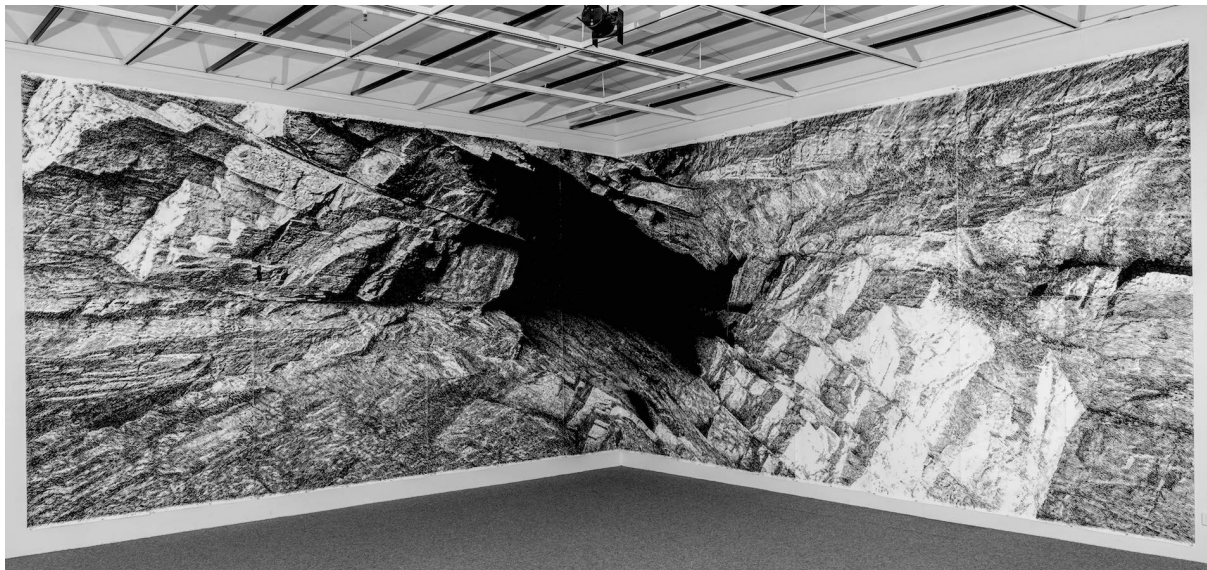


Fig. 42. David Edgar, *remote exertion 2*, 2015. Charcoal on 28 sheets of paper, 300 x 1050 cm.

When viewed from one or two metres away, the majority of the work registers as a series of oscillating fields of counteracting linear and scribbly abstract marks. In the middle of the work, in distinct contrast to the broad fields of marks, is an area of flatly drawn black void-like space. The drawing echoes pictorial tensions found in Paul Cézanne's painting, *Jardins Les Lauves*, where the visual reading of the picture oscillates between a material representation of a landscape scene and the surface treatment of planar marks.

Like many of Cézanne's later works, in *remote exertion 2* the marks and pictorial forms work both together and against each other to create tension between subject matter and the gestured marks on paper. By extension, this tension is also expressed between the subject and the gestural act of mark making itself, and in the subtle margins or edges of each of the 28 sheets of paper that make up the drawing, which ever so slightly disrupts the figure and ground relationship of the work.



Fig. 43. David Edgar, *remote exertion 2*, (detail).

Similarly, this occurs in the large drawing titled *compulsion* made after my experience at Cathedral Rock. When viewed from a distance the drawn rock forms seem to protrude outwards towards the viewer in the manner of Courbet's painting *The Source of Loue*. With my drawing, I also turned to Courbet's painted self-portrait, *The Man Made Mad by Fear*, where peripheral areas of the picture plane are left devoid of marks. The void occurs in *compulsion* in three ways, as an area representing a dark crevice of deep yielding space surrounded by rock forms, as minimally drawn open-ended ambiguous space on the left and right edges, which in this instance is suggestive of the continuation of the rock forms into empty abstract space, and subtly, in the margins and gaps occurring between the seven sheets of paper that the image is drawn onto.



Fig. 44. David Edgar, *compulsion*, 2017. Charcoal on 7 sheets of paper, 150 x 525 cm.

Remote exertion 2 and *compulsion*, and their acknowledgement of Cézanne, also speak to Alain Badiou's notion of drawing capturing the intensity and fragility of what he calls the 'seeming' of a subject by the mark making processes used to represent it. In the drawings, there is an uneasy stasis of subject and mark making, an occurrence summed up eloquently by Robert Hughes in reference to Frank Auerbach's drawing. "The 'second subject' of drawing is drawing itself, its energies and tensions, its ability to move one's eye from one node of form to another, to make the gaze appreciate lines ... as signs of force and displacement as well as literal shadow or physical edge" (Hughes & Auerbach 1990, p. 196). As Hughes states, this is where drawing and subject matter is on edge, where it quivers, hums and reverberates between sensation and representation.

The large scale of the two drawings mentioned above is key to recognising the contrasting pictorial intensities and fragilities of the works. In a number of smaller drawings, for example, titled *cultivation*, *locality*, *estranged* and *penetrating the origin*, I used a similar type of mark making. In these drawings, the subject matter (rock forms) tends to dominate the pictorial sensation of the works. Through trial and error, I attempted to explore sensation in each work with expressive forms of counteracting fields of mark making. Ultimately the rock forms within each piece shimmer and vibrate, building on and

developing further Ruskin's observation of rocks as a 'strange quivering' sensation.

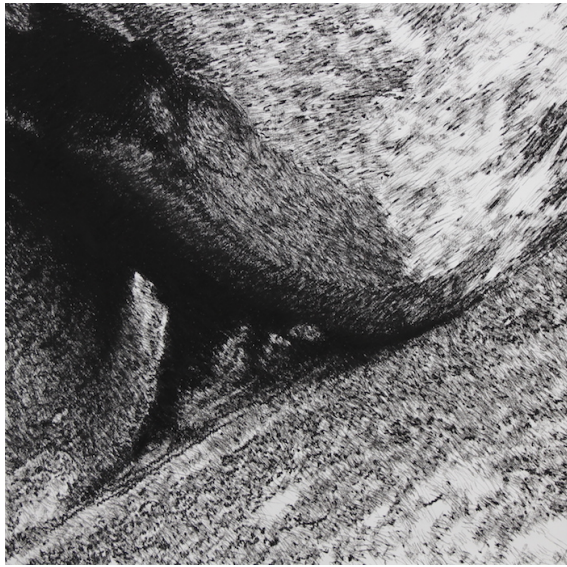


Fig. 45. David Edgar, *cultivation*, 2015. Charcoal on paper, 87 x 87 cm.



Fig. 46. David Edgar, *locality*, 2015. Charcoal on paper, 87 x 87 cm. Private collection.

The notion of edge took on other types of significance and expression. For instance, whilst I was walking at the Gorge du Cians in France. The visit occurred shortly after commencing the project, however, it wasn't until midway through the project that I made a series of drawings in response to it. Two elements of experience combined; of feeling psychologically on edge and the experience of the physical rock edges, particularly the passageways and tunnels. It was palpable yet also immaterial. The combination of the two elements takes Susan Turcot's process of juxtaposing drawn images of something next to random scribbles and combines them. My emotive energy and the forms leading through passageways, spewed out onto my sketch pad in the form of numerous quickly drawn sketches.

I adapted what I had examined and felt from viewing the works of Richard Serra and Anish Kapoor, where subtle formal elements, such as weight, negative space or edge, produced provocative sensations in me. Each sketch I made focused on different stripped-back formal drawing elements, such as weight or density, negative space, gravity, line, flow, tone, energy, shape,

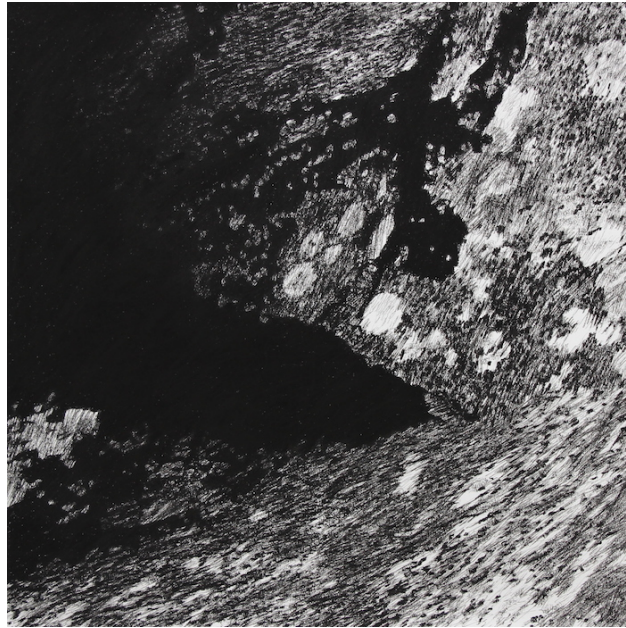


Fig. 47. David Edgar, *estranged*, 2015. Charcoal on paper, 75 x 75 cm.

edge, counteracting marks, texture, scribbling, erasure, ambiguous space, blind contour or drawing from memory. At other times, I drew with both left and right hands; or holding multiple pencils in my hand at the one time; or I would use differently weighted charcoal pencils such as HB, 2B then 9B. Layers of marks interrelated. Themes were repeated or overlapped with others informing new types of sketches of the same subject. It was an attempt to provoke sensation and to define the undefinable content of the emotive element of my encounter at the site through processes of drawing.

The outcome of some sketches was abstract but they retained an integrity that seemed to embody the elements of the experiences I had remembered. My memory was also fragile, uncertain and inconsistent as it was a year after the initial experience walking in the gorge. Subsequent sketches became freer, looser and more open-ended. I then combined them on a new larger sheet of paper, drawing layers of sketches over each other, in multiple layers, to make larger drawings.



Fig. 48. David Edgar, *mirror*, 2016. Charcoal on paper, 150 x 80 cm.

I concur with film maker Antonioni's approach around the importance of psychologically placing the viewer on edge to create atmospheres of uncertainty evocative of the void. The five large drawings I made in the Bond Store basement series were created to consciously examine and provoke experiential emotive qualities of void, of my being on edge, in response to a number of visits I made to the dark and dank interior cavernous-like site.³⁹ Whilst wandering in the dark Bond Store basement and around its outer perimeter I was aware of my own emotional disposition as melancholy, bordering on depression. Emotionally, my psychological health was on edge after the deterioration of the physical health of my wife. The body/mind/site relationship reminded me of William Styron's powerful metaphor in his book *Darkness Visible*, where he associates darkness with the feeling of being trapped, alone, and unaware whilst immersed in bouts of depression. Like

³⁹ The site, the basement of the Bond Store building, built in 1824, at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (Gallery 2012), consists of a long room with a low ceiling, minimal natural light and crumbly sandstone walls hand carved by convict labour in the early days of European settlement in Tasmania. Heavy dark timber pylons hold up a further 3 floors of building above and for the most part, a dirt floor with an overlay of loosely fitted dark grey tiles. The basement has two doorways leading down into it from ground level above. On the length of its walls can be seen the frames of blocked-out windows, which once would have looked out onto the nearby Derwent River and the site where the city of Hobart was once founded.

what occurred to me in France, the site of the shadowy basement enhanced the way I perceived certain things. László Földényi wrote, “it can be said that not only people but also places can suffer from melancholia...” (Földényi 2016, p. xi).

The drawing *deep*, and another titled *psychosomatic*, were developed to align with this thinking. The drawings are predominantly dark. Each work features only minimal amounts of light leading the eye towards more broad areas of dark voids. In an attempt to enhance the effect, I sketched whilst I was in the darkness at the Bond Store basement, and then finished the drawings in the dark when making them in my studio. When exhibited, in between each of three images is a small two-centimetre gap. The work is hung away from the wall with the gaps between them unlit and thus in dark shadow. The dark shadowy gaps and the thin narrow minimal amounts of light in the drawings alters the way the eye moves around the surface of the work creating a tension between the drawn image and the space of the gallery, in a manner similar to Richard Serra’s drawing discussed in the previous chapter titled *The American Flag is not an object of worship*.

The intense feelings of being on edge, following the Bond Store basement and the Gorge du Cians sites, were matched if not heightened, when I climbed Cathedral Rock midway through the project. When in Arizona, I heard that Cathedral Rock was a renowned ‘Vortex’⁴⁰ site, one of five such locations near Sedona. A Vortex site is a place where strong fluctuating energy seems to resonate from the earth.

⁴⁰ A ‘Vortex’, as described by Dennis Andreas in his book ‘What is a Vortex?’ is; ‘a place in nature where the earth is exceptionally alive and healthy [and] ... is reflected in a tremendous natural beauty created by the elements of land light air and water’ and ‘a vortex is a place on the planet with increased energy’ and finally, ‘the energy of a vortex acts as an amplifier. When we are in Sedona, the energy will amplify – or magnify – what we bring to it, whether on a physical, mental, emotional or spiritual level’ (Andres 2000, pp. 12-13).

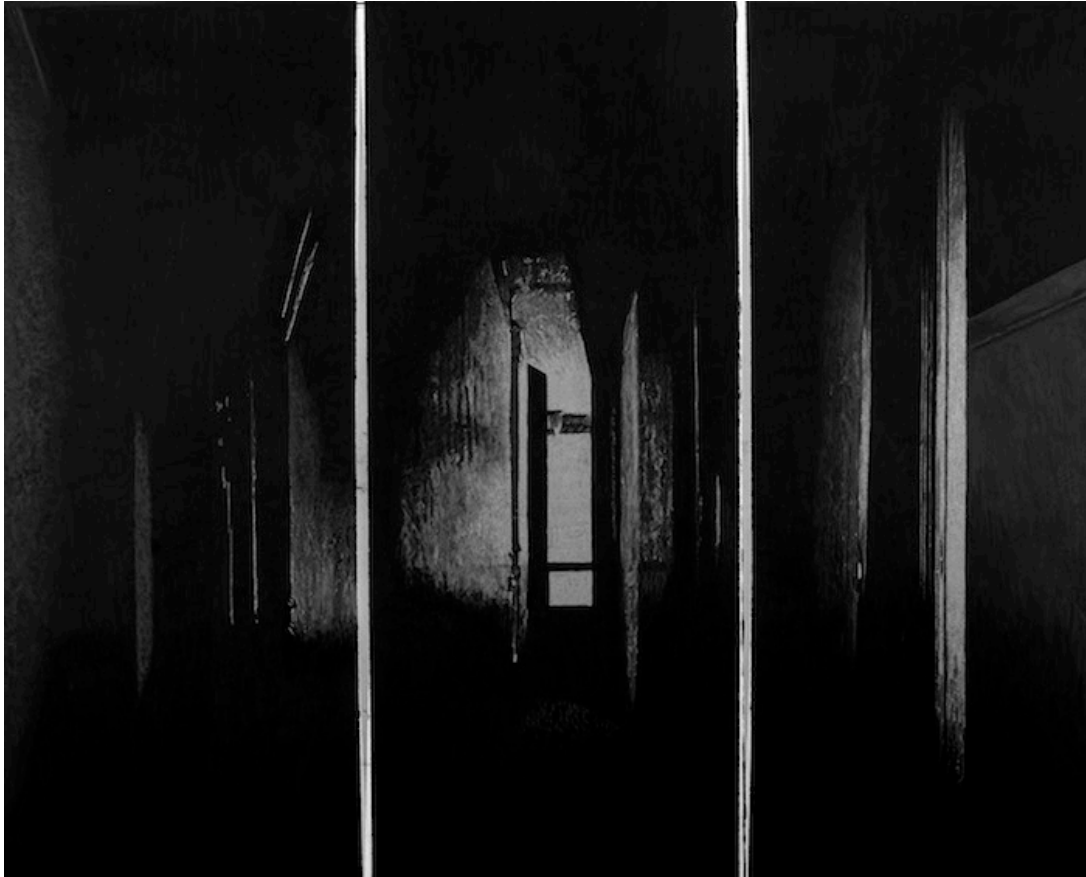


Fig. 49. David Edgar, *psychosomatic* (triptych), 2017. Charcoal and pastel on chalkboard paint and gesso on paper, 210 x 270 cm.

By the time I climbed Cathedral Rock, I had already climbed three of the other Vortex locations in Sedona and had observed nothing out of the ordinary. However, whilst climbing Cathedral Rock I did indeed experience a sense of the 'Vortex'. It was an overwhelming experience of oneness and euphoria with the earth. The feeling was palpable, however there was an absence of anything specific that I could pinpoint as a cause. It was akin to author Mark Levy's void as an 'active energy field' creating an elusive bond between myself and the rocky landscape. I felt a magnetism with the rock that day. Like it had entered into my body and I was somehow deeply linked to it.

I felt submerged in a fully immersive body/mind/site sensation that extended deeper than any other experience I had felt in the past. As I departed in the car I imagined an interplay of fuzzy drawn lines flowing out of the rock forms, into space, through my body (where it had affected my mind) and back out into the environment.



Fig. 50. David Edgar, *heat*, 2016. Charcoal on paper, 82 x 62 cm.

Later in my studio, I appropriated Alain Badiou and Derek Pigrum's theories of the act of drawing as combinations of mind, arm, hand, body, medium (charcoal), support and studio with my images and recollections of Cathedral Rock. I made drawings that consisted of many layers of masses of line. The representative form of the rock seemed less important than the energetic pulsating quivering flow of lines. Like Derrida's analogy of the blind, whereby a blind person has an attuned sense of hearing, or touch in their reaching out for clarity and feeling their way around things with their hands held out in front of them (Derrida & Musée du Louvre, 1993), I felt like I had a greater sensory awareness of the emotive and atmospheric subject matter of Cathedral Rock.

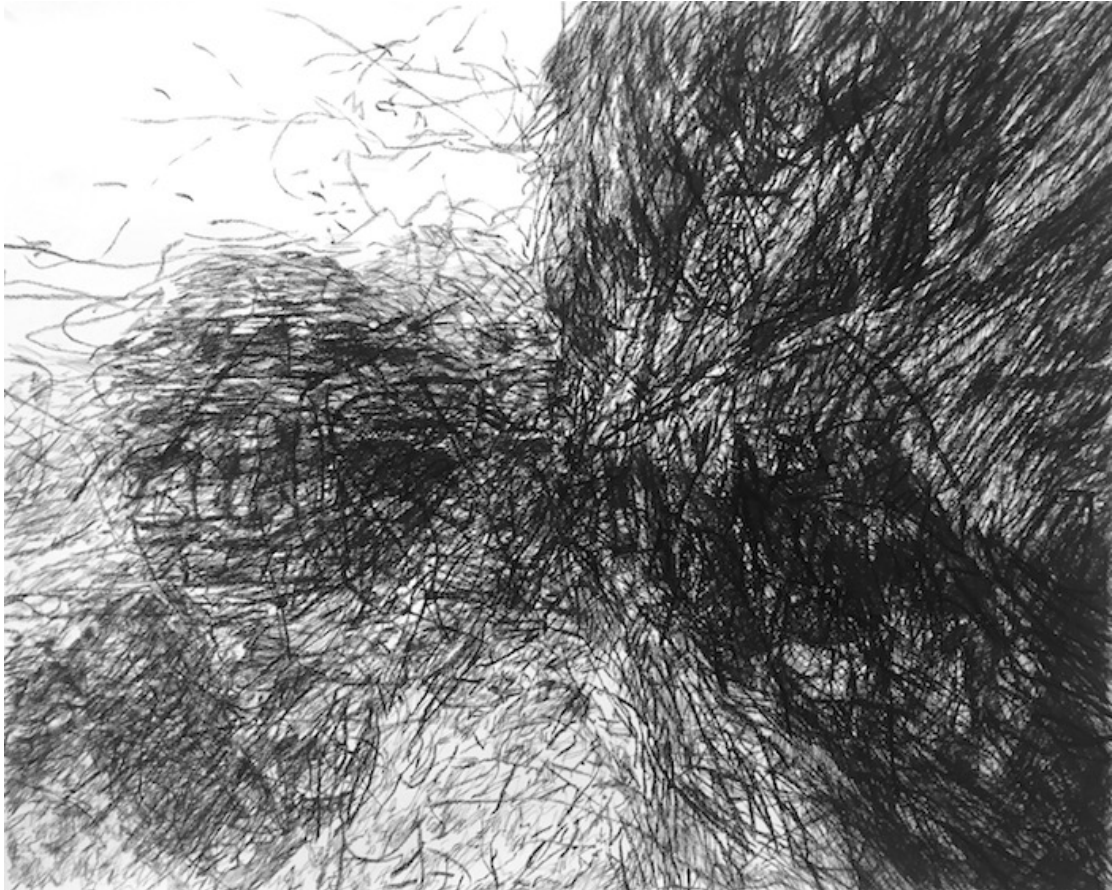


Fig. 51. David Edgar, *brink*, 2017. Charcoal on paper, 75 x 95 cm.

A series of works were produced at this time. They evolved from sketches that used loose and free-forms of mark making. Expanding again on Derrida's notion of feeling my way around the drawing as blindness, I combined an attempt to both 'geomorphize' myself with the 'Vortex' effect whilst responding to the qualities of stratification and erosion observed on the rock forms. The resulting drawings, for example *heat*, *brink*, *base* and, *finding zion*, reveal rock forms as masses of speculative meandering and layered marks. Like Susan Turcot's 'Divided Subjects' series of drawings, these drawings engage not only the representational image of something, but also the expression of my inner emotive state in the tangled mass of lines that blur and mutate the images.



Fig. 52. David Edgar, *base*, 2017. Charcoal on paper, 75 x 95 cm.

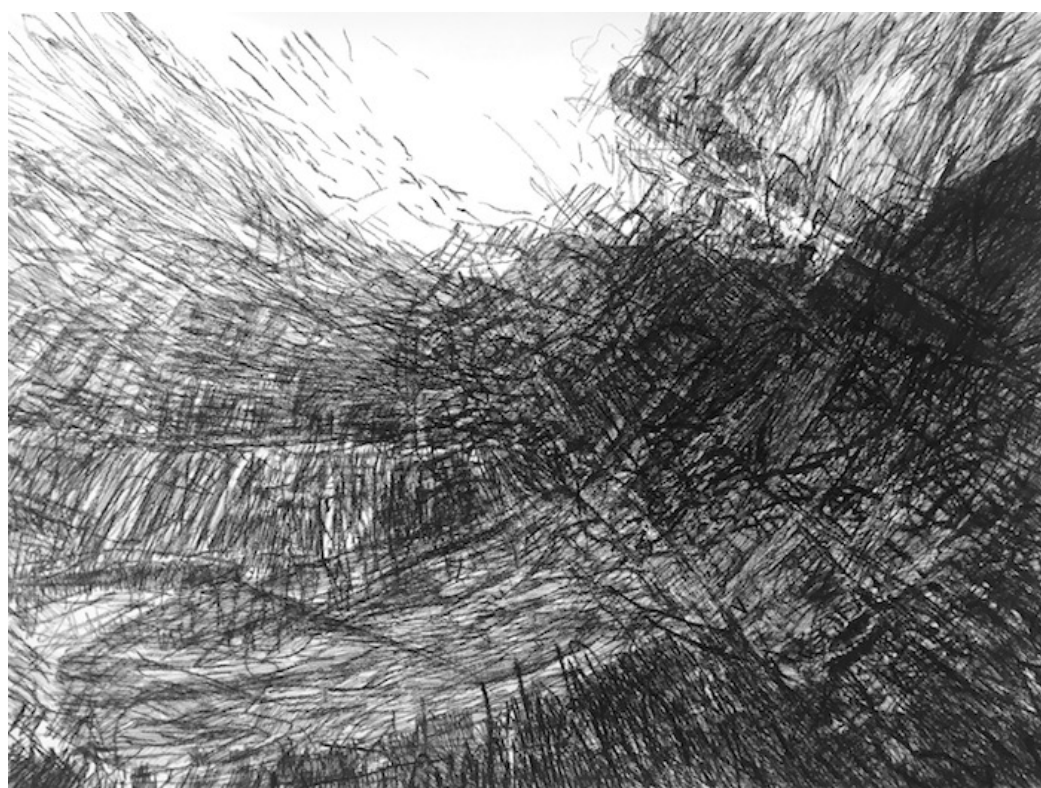


Fig. 53. David Edgar, *finding zion*, 2017. Charcoal on paper, 75 x 95 cm.

Erasure is prominent in the sketches and the drawings and is reminiscent of the repetitive processes used by Frank Auerbach. In the drawings titled *denial*, *crawl*, *arch*, *life*, *shallow* and *past*, the process involves drawing a number of layers that are then erased leaving only a trace of the initial marks, then redrawn using layers of marks derived from other sketches. Erased forms suggest absence where the ghostly remains of marks once made, linger on the drawing surface. Erased and drawn marks depict both presence and absence of the images' subject matter. Absence speaks to the void, of forgotten information. As the artist, my own remembering and forgetting combine in response to altered and eroded experiences by the very fact they occur in the studio at the time of drawing.

The energetic mass of layered lines resonates with the ambiguous mind/body/site response felt when at Cathedral Rock where the void becomes the depiction of an uncertain relationship between pictorial space and free-flowing mark making energy. The resulting drawings merge photographs, experiences, and memories in the mark making and their erased remnants on the surface of the paper.

An original entry point in this project was around memory of Tasman Island in relation to Husserl's 'second level' of seeing, as a direct focus on reflective experiences of the recall of long past experiences. Towards the end of the project, an alternative process to demonstrate memory emerged as a deeper type of remembered experience directly relative to the period of research and the drawings made within it. If memory changed, then why couldn't my drawings?



Fig. 54. David Edgar, *life*, 2017. Charcoal on paper, 117 x 88 cm.



Fig. 55. David Edgar, *past*, 2017. Charcoal on paper, 98 x 71 cm.

I re-worked two drawings, titled *remote exertion 1* and 3, that I had made at the start of the project. The drawings were thus made over the three-and-a-half-year PhD period. I brought them back out into my studio towards the end of the project and altered them by blackening out, erasure and breaking them down into smaller sections. The process was an extension of how memory alters the drawings over time. The works reflect types of remembering as fullness as the first drawing was almost completely blackened out with charcoal, and forgetting as erasure in the second, where charcoal was eliminated leaving only traces of the initial drawn image. There is no reason why these drawings cannot continue to evolve, further into the reaches of the void, beyond this project as the experience and memory of them continue to alter.

3.2: Techniques and media

Through my project, preparation for drawings commenced with each of the sites through observation of conscious experience. These observations built on Husserl's phenomenologic theory and used them as a structured approach to seek out attributes of the void. The starting point included acknowledging Heidegger's notion of getting to 'know' a place through the deep engagement of 'being-there' (Heidegger 1962, p. 27). I examined the relationships between my mind and the site, with my body, to attain an understanding of my psychological impressions of the void.

I noticed the anthropomorphological qualities of a rock form. I considered these forms as embracing a connection between my body as a conduit to the outer world of material things and my thinking mind. Evidence of this can be seen in the drawings titled



Fig. 56. David Edgar, *midway point*, 2017. Charcoal on paper, 75 x 95 cm.

midway point, remembering,

panic, and life where suggestive types of orifices of the body are formed. In reflection, the sexuality suggested in the works deviated from the line of inquiry of the project however imagery of this kind continued to re-appear as the project progressed. This could become an area to pursue in future research at the completion of the project.

I recorded my experiences at each site in a number of ways. I wrote in diaries, I took thousands of photographs, I made sketches, recorded video and collected all sorts of other related words, images and artifacts. The collected materials joined with my memories as traces of the experiences and became new experiences. In my studio, they were reshaped, altered, amplified, and distorted. A sense of displacement, of being dis-embodied from site but embodied in my studio, informed all of the works.

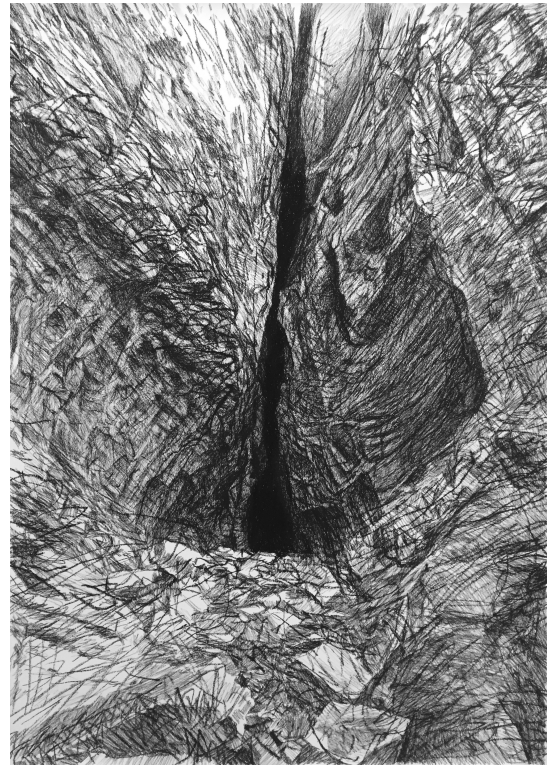


Fig. 57. David Edgar, *panic*, 2017. Charcoal on paper, 95 x 75 cm.

Crucial media I used in the process of reengaging with my conscious experience and memory were my own photographs. These photographs helped me to grasp, remember, and re-place the things (rock forms) experienced as they had existed in the world. They presented objective documentary evidence of static moments of each experience yet as a group of images, I perceived them as containing multiple traces of unfolding streams of consciousness. They acted similarly to Husserl's 'second level' of seeing, of reflective experience, but the photographs presented seeing through the articulation of fragmented conscious experience. They would be further fragmented when viewed in my studio as they provided visual detail that was out of context from the physical and conscious experiences I had had at each site.

Even though the context of the photographic images had altered, when I looked at them they triggered something intimate inside me. They gathered what would have otherwise been moments of forgetting or absences of experience. They are the “absence of memory” writes Lucy Lippard (Lippard 1997, p. 20) and I see them as both facts and as ghosts or shadows of things they depict. I was able to explore in more detail that which I may not have noticed during my initial observation. “They are the imperfect means by which we fill the voids of memory in modern culture, to preserve the remnants of a world that has disappeared” (Lippard 1997, pp. 55-56). My photographs captured moments that ‘fill voids’, and thus contain the presence of gaps, absences, silences, and contradictions, as disruptions of the unravelling streams of conscious experience.

In my studio, as I planned drawings, I experimented with the photographs’ pictorial qualities. The photographs translate the three-dimensions of the rock forms into two-dimensional images. Further, I cut them up, photocopied them, blew them up, manipulated them in Photoshop, collaged and drew on them. The altered photographs transition from objective evidence to be embedded with subjective representations of my experience as they mutated in the studio. During this process of transformation, photographs were blown up and projected, revealing alternative two-dimensional marks visible on the surface of each photograph. Here, the form and content of the photographs and the methods of making marks when drawing, support each other, in the manner of McKeever, to re-invigorate the subject matter and heighten the visual qualities being explored.

I expanded on this at other times in the act of making a drawing, for example in the series of drawings titled *remote exertion*, and in the works, *awaken* and *progress*.

I digitally projected photographic images and sketches onto larger paper supports pinned to the wall. The projector allowed me to work faster. I manipulated images, cropped them and adjusted them to alternative sizes or scales, and rapidly explored constructing alternative types of spatial and layered effects. The process,



Fig. 58. David Edgar, *awaken*, 2016. Charcoal on paper, 140 x 140 cm. Collection of the Artist.

like that of collage which I also used, offered alternative ways of observing the pictorial surface qualities of the photographs and sketches and in this way extended my mark making vocabulary.

The use of collage reflected my diluted, fractured, and deteriorated memories of Tasman Island. I adapted Paul Cézanne's use of vertical planar marks, which he used to create tensions between subject matter, mark making and pictorial space, and made collages that rearranged components of my photographs into new images. The new images reconstructed segments of planar rock forms but in dynamic counteracting ways.

Unlike the traditional use of collage, where separate pieces of imagery are brought together

in disparate ways,⁴¹ my approach was to form seamless, life-like images of new types of rock forms and their surrounds.⁴² I scaled up the collages and drew them freehand or projected and drew onto a larger paper support. The resulting images, titled *peak*, *blade* and *fountain*, exaggerate the vibrating/shimmering counteractions of the rock forms with tonal variation.

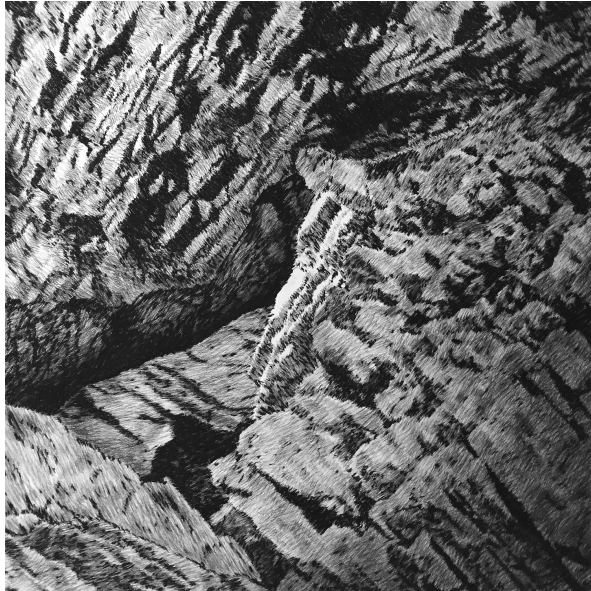


Fig. 59. David Edgar, *peak*, 2016. Charcoal on paper, 120 x 120 cm.



Fig. 60. David Edgar, *blade*, 2016. Charcoal on paper, 120 x 120 cm.

I discontinued using collage following completion of this series. I found the drawings had a flatness about them without much in the way of dynamic pictorial depth, even though there was a sense of ambiguous space. I also felt that the mark making, derived from the collages, became stilted and somewhat robotic and the images lacked a sense of my own expressive personality. However, the idea of collage, of taking separate elements of images and bringing them together to form new images, continued. I re-thought through the process, and, instead, used layers of my own rough and freely hand drawn sketches to replace

⁴¹ Authors Busch, Klanten, Hellige, Krohn & Lindberg write of collage as 'separate things that belong together', that 'unite the disparate' (Busch et al. 2013, pp. 3-4).

⁴² A number of experiments were also made where collaged elements signified disparate images but these were discarded due to the way they further flattened spatial perspective.

collaged photographs as source material. This idea also informed a way of working in Photoshop. I brought together a range of my sketches and photographs and layered these on top of each other, then manipulated them with varying degrees of transparency. New compositions, with a shimmer and vibration of the subject in the image rather than mark making, emerged, such as in the drawing of the Bond Store basement titled *fall*, and in the drawings *unwilling*, *eclipse* and *arch*.



Fig. 61. David Edgar, *eclipse*, 2018. Charcoal on 2 sheets of paper, 145 x 330 cm.

In these drawings, there are dark void-like areas on the picture plane. Different types of rock forms, in varied tones, occurs at the surrounding periphery of the pictures edges tempting the position of the viewer to look upwards and into the dark shadowy space within. The effect shifts the horizontal and vertical perspective, of looking up or looking down into the space of the work. It was an effect I had seen used by Michelangelo Antonioni to disrupt the unity of the narrative through the *mise en scène* of his films.⁴³

⁴³ The *mise en scène* of a film refers to the arrangement of the scenery, props, etc., on the set or location that the film is being shot.

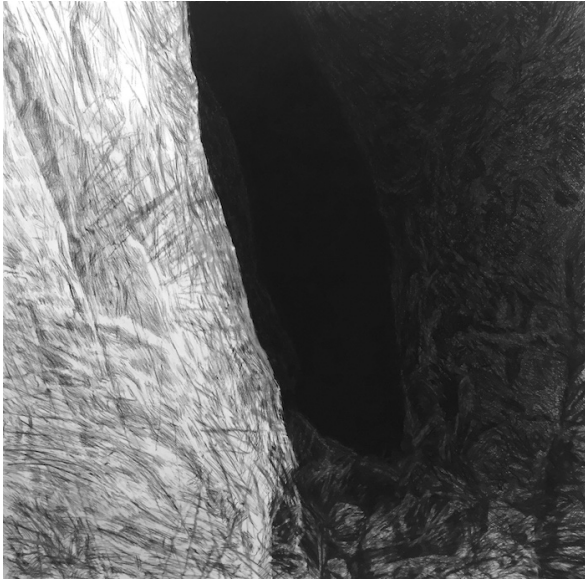


Fig. 62. David Edgar, *arch*, 2018. Charcoal on paper, 125 x 125 cm.



Fig. 63. David Edgar, *crawl*, 2018. Charcoal on paper, 125 x 125 cm.

Similarly, it was an effect conjured by John Virtue in his large monochromatic tonal paintings of London to suggest subject matter as timeless, by subverting the horizontal view of the city from above. I depicted altered points of view in *fall*, *unwilling*, *eclipse*, and *arch* and in other drawings titled *crawl*, *unsettled*, *penetrating the origin* and *narrow extremities*, and in the large drawing *remote exertion 2*. The viewer explores a range of light or dark void-like spaces surrounded by rock forms with no visible horizon. The shifts in perspective, and the lack of horizon, disorients and interrupts naturalism in the space of the works. The pictorial effects are akin to Courbet's painting *The Source of the Loue*. In his painting the cliff face compresses depth, creating a feeling of claustrophobia and frames a central dark receding void-like area.

The shift in the vertical and horizontal in the drawing *remote exertion 2, arch, crawl, night* and *unsettled* also creates an unusual sense of weight and gravity. The black void-like shapes in the works, whilst they yield to create the impression of deep space, also hover in the space of the picture plane seemingly defying weight and gravity, a similar sensation I had observed when viewing Anish Kapoor's *Void Field*.

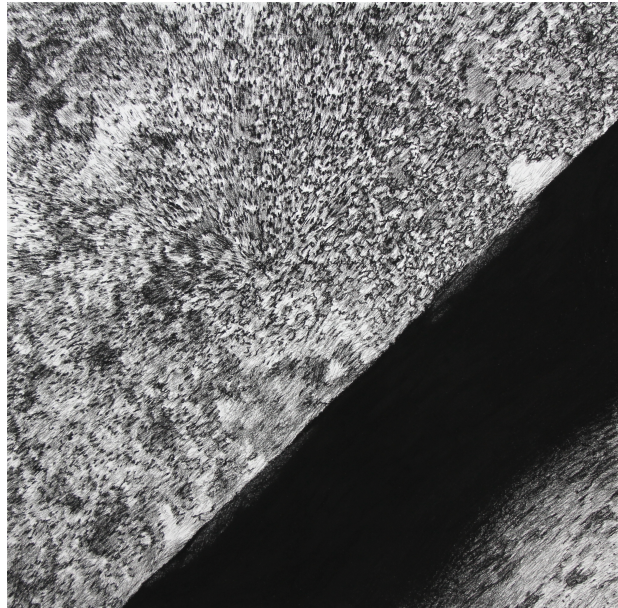


Fig. 64. David Edgar, *penetrating the origin*, 2015. Charcoal on paper, 95 x 92 cm. Private collection.

As the project developed the compositional structure of the drawings changed. I incorporated unusual angles, and fragmented and emptied pictorial spaces to expose uncertainties and fragilities in the drawings. These effects can be seen in the drawings titled *compulsion, eclipse* and *unwilling*. The compositional process is reminiscent of the painting *Jardins Les Lauves* explored earlier by Paul Cézanne where the placement of marks and blank pictorial space speak as much to sensation as they do the observation of specific features of place. I drew these images on multiple sheets of paper to create an additional tension on the edge or margin of the work, as I had done previously in the drawing *remote exertion 2*. Further, I compressed and recomposed spaces to engender feelings of claustrophobia and ambiguity including off-centring the focal point of images. The techniques were adapted from Antonioni to heighten the psychological impact of a shot or scene. I also used these techniques in my drawings titled *tangle, mirror, pause* and *midway*.

point. The works create similar tensions as spatial perspective jolts the viewer with open-ended, ambiguous and/or confined spaces.



Fig. 65. David Edgar, *night*, 2018. Charcoal on paper, 125 x 125 cm.



Fig. 66. David Edgar, *unsettled*, 2018. Charcoal on paper, 125 x 125 cm.

As the project progressed I found it increasingly difficult to come to terms with how the unravelling of cinematic form over time differed to the perception of a drawing viewed in static form. However, I revisited my interpretation of Husserl's 'second level' of seeing as reflective experience, where my photographs presented seeing through the articulation of many fragments of conscious experience. In the final series of drawings, titled *eclipse* and *unwilling*, I captured the Cathedral Rock site in this manner. The process is derived from Cézanne's method of factoring in the changes that occurred in his observation brought on by his own subtle movements. He developed this approach when he realized that his movements, even if ever so slight, caused a change in the pictorial effect of what he was observing. The change, by being consciously observed by him, was invested into the artwork as a change in the position of the marks made, causing his landscape depictions to subtly shift and, at times, vibrate with each different observation and placement of marks. I

extended Cézanne's method into photography and took a series of photographs reflecting my subtle movements whilst observing rock forms at Cathedral Rock. Each photograph was layered in Photoshop, then sketched loosely multiple times in an extension of the layering process, similar to how I had made the Gorge du Cians drawings. The process adapts Miha Štrukelj's layered combination of presence and absence by building up images in Photoshop to construct as well as mutate its various parts. Further, I combine McKeever's dichotomous technique of juxtaposing a blown-up photograph next to a drawing of the same image, but I layered them on top of each other to explore alternative types of relationships of the depiction of things. In these works, phenomenology and photography combine with Derrida's notion of blindness adapted as loosely drawn sketches where objective perception coexists with subjective expression.

With charcoal and paper being the consistent mediums used across all artworks their application was modified according to the differing conditions that effected the gathering of source material and the differing features and conditions of each site.



Fig. 67. David Edgar, *curtain*, 2016. Charcoal on paper, 80 x 145 cm.

These differences are manifest in my techniques of mark-making such as scribbling and tonal variation. For example, whilst making the Bond Store series of drawings, I used various types of flat black matt paint on paper to explore working dark tones onto a dark surface with the aim to achieve a darker, moodier, and more sombre body of work.

Charcoal, possibly the most malleable of all drawing media, permits a full tonal range through variation in the weight and pressure of the mark, and through blending, layering and erasure. Throughout the project, I explored different approaches to drawing line quality in relation to the white or black surfaces of the paper. When I worked on white paper I made lines with pieces of charcoal soft pastel sticks. If I used paper coated with an even film of black, then the lines were made with both charcoal soft pastel and dark or mid grey pastels.

Charcoal is a naturally occurring material that can be altered and refined for drawing. It has been defined as 'primal and elemental' (Dexter 2005, p. 6), whilst its properties give an authenticity to the



Fig. 68. David Edgar, *derived*, 2016. Charcoal on paper, 120 x 120 cm.

rendering of weight, texture and pictorial drama (Petherbridge 2010, p. 4 & 137). I use a charcoal soft pastel, processed into a rectangular stick made from chalk with a gum binder, for creating density and flatness, and hard, medium and extra-soft charcoal pencils for contrast. It is hence suitable for suggesting equally form and space. It is a medium that

‘acquires a life of its own’ (Munnelly 2010), with an intensity and authenticity that draws a viewer inwards.

When used to develop areas of dense black, charcoal tends to make space yield. Artist Ian McKeever wrote on these qualities, “White is never so white that we cannot see into it, but black can be so black that we cannot see out of it” (Mogensen 2011, p. 132). As McKeever implies, the flat areas of black in the majority of my drawings, made with charcoal soft pastel, activate as fields of void-like, ambiguously yielding space, evoking a sense of mystery and the unknown within.

Rock forms drawn using linear scribbly forms of mark making populate my drawings. They surround the void-like spaces in the work. I used scribbles to activate expressive, speculative and dynamic spaces in the works. Bernice Rose adapts this aspect relative to the expressive nature of drawing: “Expressionism could be described as a style that is ruled by

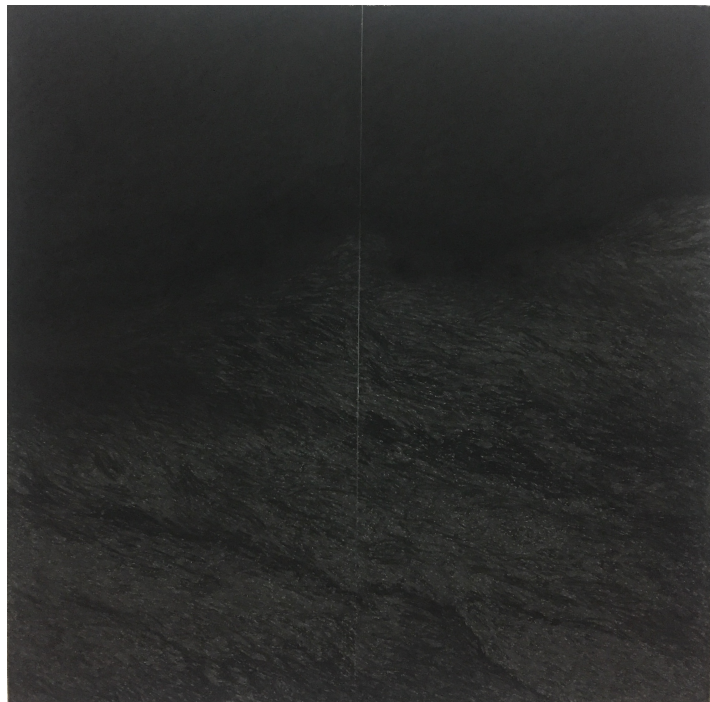


Fig. 69. David Edgar, *Remote Exertion 3* (reworked detail), 2017. Charcoal on paper, 145 x 145 cm.

line, with the line acting not only as an embodiment of the sensual but as the expressive vehicle for the artist's state of mind as absolute and all-encompassing" (Rose & Museum of Modern Art (New York N.Y.) 1992, p. 33).

Scribbling in my drawings engages Rose's embodiment of the sensual and psychological, in the manner of Turcot's drawing *Beguine*, in their capacity to form predictability and unpredictability. The scribbles, as mark making, have their own personality but are also deeply rooted in the maker's personality, a point made by Jean Dubuffet when he defined them as 'landscapes of the brain' (MacGregor 1898, p. 298). When I make a scribble, I am conscious of the void as well as Badiou's 'seeming' and Derrida's notions of drawing being a ruin of a thing as a type of non-seeing, as I am uncertain of exactly what the scribbly mark will do. I control it to a certain point, such as where I place it, but it also has its own uncertainty as it is formed by the disjointed gestural movements of my hand and body. It is akin to being in a meditative state, where there is "neither conscious nor unconscious, but somewhere in between" (Maclagan 2014, p. 122). It is a fundamental type of expression that "yield[s] an immense range of visual effects" (Kellogg 1970, p. 18) embodying the most raw and basic psychological temperament of an experience. It is Paul Klee's dot going on short ambiguous, spasmodic, meandering walks, and when repeated over and over on the surface of paper is an excellent way to build up variations of tone. I use scribbling as a way to represent ubiquitous tensions in the visual communication of nature as being part object and part inner void-like dialogue.



Drawing is the process I use to develop relationships, and to visually manifest and transform experiences, between myself and the world. I use forms of scribbling in all of my drawings concurrently with the primal and elemental medium of charcoal. Medium and techniques in my drawings reference experiential knowledge. They develop tensions, energies and forces in the work, where rock forms vibrate, shimmer and pulsate, and where space is

representative, ambiguous, and on the verge of abstraction, as it yields or flattens. During the artistic process, the active use of the psychological condition of remembering and forgetting, in reference to the way experience transforms at a later date in the studio, alters, disrupts and erodes my images further. These are manifest in the altered depictions of subject matter, and in the processes and techniques I use to make the drawings, for example by using semi-random scribbles, layering and erasure. The drawn elements attempt to conjure unease and uncertainty as well as psychological and metaphysical qualities in the forms they depict, and as such invoke physical and emotional qualities of the void.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

The project is a series of drawings, and an accompanying exegesis, that elucidates metaphysical characteristics of the void. The picturing of qualities of the void took on many forms but was common to all drawings. Concepts associated with the void informed the initial framework for analyzing intense personal experiences from the four different geographic locations. The way the experiences were perceived subsequently transformed when they were later reflected upon as memory. As memories, they altered, or merged with other memories from different experiences or deteriorated altogether: the outcome being the formation of new types of experiences. The marks that I made in my drawings were developed to express these changes. These marks were loose, scribbly, energetic or erased, formed into abstract and ambiguous spaces through variations of tone. The resulting drawings characterise the existential nature and fragility of experience and reveal deeper understandings of my impressions of the world as a tension between self and the material properties of the physical world.

The study of these concepts was contextualised through analysis of a number of artists, whose artworks manifest a deeply reflective interpretation of their tacit experience of the material world. Collectively, this field of artistic practice exemplifies spatial and psychological tensions, expressed with a sensitivity to mark making, with explorations of tone and as areas of blank or flat monochromatic shades. Whilst the concept of void is not always central to these artists' work, selected works have been included to illuminate the many ways that artists have used mark-making and pictorial spaces to interpret concepts of the void and how these have informed the parameters and direction of the research.

During the course of the project, voids were explored within a progression of concepts: as an immaterial entity characteristic of emptiness, nothingness, negation, and displacement; to one with potential to be materialised as the subtle presence of something vacant or absent. Examples of this include depicting empty things with fullness, the space between two objects, or as blank spaces in an artwork. But most influential in terms of advancing the project aims is the correlation between the concept of voids and memories and intense emotional states. This correspondence emerged in the second half of research as an entity embodying a relationship between thoughts and the perception of the physical and material qualities of the rock forms I observed. The void in this way engaged a symbiotic dialogue between my thinking self and the material elements of a site. I represented the rock forms with many layers of energetic mark making and erasure in response to the many layered characteristics perceived as emotive states and in the deterioration of experience in memory.

My comprehension of voids also provokes metaphysical thinking associated with deep and layered geological time. This is evidenced in the traces of erosion perception in the marks scoured on the surface of the rocks and the stratified layers created through slow yet violent upheavals of the earth. I examined and drew from the minutiae, corners, edges and the spaces situated in between rock forms, such as entrances to tunnels, pathways, caves and canyons, and found within deep cracks, crevices, and sinkholes. The voids I experienced were interpreted through drawing of images of dark shadowy lonely places. Here the void becomes a yielding and mysterious space that unsettles the perspective of each work.

Within the picturing of qualities of the void, through drawing voids, the following paradoxes arose: empty things with fullness, as having form and nothingness with representational and abstract qualities; through fluctuating snippets of memory replete with forgetting and absences; and in the tenuous materialisation of internal emotive states. These conditions effected the way I made and erased marks and composed subjects in the drawings. Crucial to the latter point was the concept of disunity as evidenced in the compositional filmic form of Michelangelo Antonioni. I examined Antonioni's shifting perspectives of view, his off-centred imagery, and the inclusion of empty space or minimalist form, and embedded these qualities into the compositions of my work.

The drawings that I believe resonate strongly with the aims of the project, titled *progress*, *awaken*, *compulsion*, *remote exertion 2*, *arch*, *crawl*, *unwilling*, and *eclipse*, are representations of rock forms that contradict and compliment the delineated and

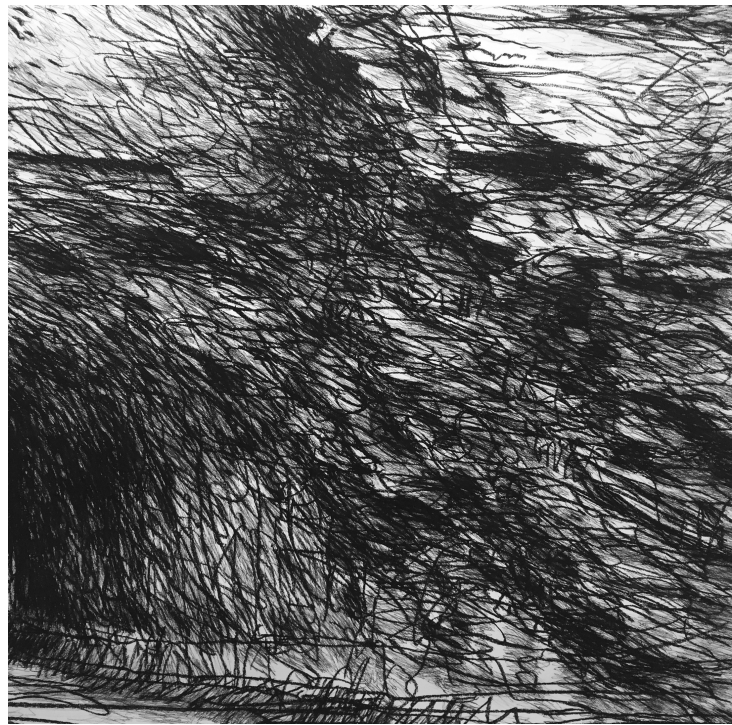


Fig. 70. David Edgar, *progress*, 2016. Charcoal on paper, 105 x 105 cm.

marked areas of the void. These drawings are of quiet/lonely and gentle/benign subjects, yet become, through drawing, invested with dark and brooding qualities. The intent was to create drawings that fuse contemplative states with those of sparseness and vacuous-ness agitating the void as mysterious and fragile in content.

The significance of the research lies in the expansion of inquiry into, and knowledge of, individual and social-cultural relationship and connection to the physical and metaphysical world through the application of phenomenologic theory. This approach creates a new pathway to gain tacit knowledge and understanding of phenomena, experience and their interpretation and expression through artistic practice.

My study broadens Husserl's approach to phenomenology through application of his theory to practical research. Husserl's phenomenologic approach was adapted as a method to examine and analyse my conscious experience, linking cognitive and remembered impressions of the void in the material world, in relation to the four sites I visited or re-visited throughout the project. I gathered material from each site as documentation of looking and synthesising the range of observed phenomenon. Close observation revealed idiosyncrasies not previously noticed in the rock forms, its surrounds and its effect on my mood and temperament. Spending time looking and thinking about the experience also engaged an understanding and respect for the elements observed. The act of drawing, the focused concentration of the observation of these things over an extended period of time, allowed for a deeper understanding of phenomena and its interpretation to be achieved.

The relationship between Husserl's analysis of the effect of experience on memory was crucial for conceiving qualities of the void as deteriorated and erased forms in the drawings. Synthesising Husserl's ideas with other writers influenced by his work contextualised my approach (such as Gaston Bachelard, John Sallis, Christopher Tilley and Barry Lopez) and revealed evidence of their methods for observing site (such as the effect of the body, as poetic and deeply sensuous, or as intensely analytical).

Although I did not engage phenomenology to analyse the working process whilst drawing, I did develop phenomenologic approaches to discover more expressive ways of engaging and recording the content observed at each site. These included adapting Husserl's 'essence' of the 'adumbrations' of the material things perceived through my sense of sight and through my psychological temperament at the time of experiencing. Once the process of experiencing (Husserl's 'noesis') occurred, I then carefully attempted to describe and interpret the content experienced (Husserl's 'noema'). My comprehension of the void as related to the subject matter and its picturing emerged through a combination of: intense observation of the geological forms and surface of the rocks found at each site; the atmosphere and ambience of the site as affected by viewpoint; light and weather conditions; and, my own mood and temperament that I brought to the experience: I often experienced a sense of being on edge, feeling despair and melancholy, or oneiric euphoria, or isolation, emptiness, negation and absence.

Layers of mood and atmosphere, existential sensation and observations of stratification and erosion combined and were effected over time as they accumulated in my memory and in time altered and mutated. In reworking a specific experience over and over, within the confines of my studio, memories and drawing became one. In this way, I recognised that the act of remembering, rather than that of the direct experience, informed the development and resolution of the drawings.

To this I brought my years of experience of image-making and alongside these intuitive responses I conveyed the rigors of techniques such as careful and slow observation of the visual qualities of things and their adaption into visual form through controlled

compositional placement of subject, tonal value and dynamic forms of mark making, such as hatching and scribbling. Yet the drawings also feature absence, formed by erasure and ambiguous or abstract space. The studio, and the use of photography and collage, created shifts in figure ground relationships and heightened the effect of disunity. To draw in the studio, distanced in time and space from the original experience, revealed in the work both gaps and displacement but also intimate and rich details and fragments drawn from my technical experience.

The most effective drawings express new ways of synthesising thought and the picturing of qualities of the void and have created speculative images composed of abstract linear and scribbly marks. The layered and loose marks, signifiers of the internal emotive experience of the drawer, bring energy into the works and creates simultaneously a sense of certainty and uncertainty. The scribbly marks combine with areas of tone, defining contrasts of space as either flat or yielding monochromatic areas on the picture plane. At other times, drawn marks are simply abstract marks working together to form representative imagery. At this point, the void-like condition between the thinking mind and its cognitive relationship to material things as they exist in the world, becomes amplified and engages deeper learning about what is drawn through the conflation of layers of experience into a whole. With each drawing, deeper layers of information are embedded within my thoughts and into the artwork.

In the drawings, I captured characteristics of the void as relationships between my embodied perception of an object (rock forms), the alteration and mutation of the experience of that object as effected by memory, and in speculative mark making when

activating as an abstract entity. The drawings embody both the physical and metaphysical, where paradoxical qualities of the void, as uncertain, fragile and equivocal, are invoked.

In future work, there is scope for exploring alternative approaches, for example with collage, to shift expressive alterations, mutations and abstractions in the work, relative to Psychogeology,⁴⁴ and in reference to Psychogeography as devised by Lettrist and Situationist International groups in 1950s and 60s. The playful experiences these groups explored and their effect on the subversive collages in late 1970s and 80s punk rock aesthetic, reflect qualities of the void as nihilism, negation and annihilation, where mutations and alterations of subject matter in images and pictorial space represent radical new forms of image making. Another area of inquiry that presented but that fell outside the parameters of the project was the anthropo-morphological forms naturally residing in the shapes of the organic rock forms. A series of work focusing on accentuating these qualities in drawings as a means to highlight the intrinsic nature of the body's relationship to the world could be pursued. A further area of interest is to explore in greater detail contrasts between places and spaces in relation to Cezanne's observation of his own perception, in the slight movements he made effecting his placement of marks, when developing pictorial forms. Linking this notion to Bernice Rose's observation of Richard Serra's work as 'a field of organised sensations' (Garrels, Rose & White 2011, p. 43), and with the concepts of erasure and erosion, has the potential to expose a deeper range uncertainties in the pictorial representation of things.

⁴⁴ In the 1970s, Geologist R. Allen coined the term Psychogeology to describe the conscious study "of mental life and behaviour in relation to geological processes" (Allen 1995-2012). He developed the idea after reading about Psychogeography (the importance of one's individual psychological temperament in an urban environment) and the fictional Psychohistory (predicting possible human behavior on other planets). Psychogeology proposes a metaphysical terrain, one that is predominantly formed by the forces of nature rather than as constructed by humans.

Appendix

List of activities during candidature

Solo exhibitions

- 2018 *Agitating the Void*, PhD submission, Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart
- 2017 *Pause*, Handmark, Hobart
- 2017 *Full Void*, Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (during 10 Days on the Island arts festival), Hobart
- 2015 *New work*, Handmark, Hobart
- 2015 Makers Workshop & Atrium Gallery UTAS, (Tasmanian International Arts Festival, formally 10 Days on the Island) Burnie
- 2014 William Henry, Cambridge MA, US

Selected group exhibitions

- 2018 *Exquisite Corpse*, Contemporary Art Tasmania, North Hobart, TAS
- 2018 *Black + White*, Handmark, Hobart, TAS
- 2017 Sydney Contemporary (with Handmark), Sydney NSW
- 2016 *Inappropriate Appropriate Idea*, The Curated Shelf, West Hobart, TAS
- 2016 Lola Greeno birthday celebration; and, Landscape exhibition, Handmark, Hobart, TAS
- 2016 *Let Sleeping Ducks Lie* for Duck Lake, for activist performance, Moulting Lagoon, TAS
- 2015 Maatsuyker Collection Exhibition, Moonah Arts Centre, TAS
- 2015 Hutchins Art Prize, Hobart, TAS
- 2015 Annual works on paper exhibitions; and, The Glover Landscape, Handmark, Hobart & Evandale, TAS
- 2015 *Exquisite*, Rosny Barn Clarence, and Henry Jones Art Hotel Hobart, TAS

Grants and residencies

- 2017 Arts Tasmania, Individual Investment grant
- 2016 Pozible crowd-funding campaign, achieving over 180% of funding
- 2016 Arts Tasmania, Crowbar grant

2016 Sedona Summer Colony—a new American residency program, established by Sedona Arts Center and Verde Valley School, Arizona, USA

Collection acquisitions

Office of the Vice Chancellor, University of Tasmania

Public Art (Tasmanian Government Art Site Scheme) Tasmania Parks and Wildlife – Mole Karst Caves

Spirit of Tasmania

Cancer Council

Kedumba Drawing Collection

Maatsuyker Collection Group

Cradle Coast campus, University of Tasmania

Selected other arts activities

Conference presentation, *Agitating the void*, 2018, PGR Drawing Research Network

Conference: *Practice and Drawing/Diverse Perspectives: examining possibilities for drawing in practice led research*, Loughborough University, UK

Peer assessor, 2018-2020, Cultural and Creative Industries Expert Register, Department of State Growth

Panel member, 2018, Arts Residencies Program, Arts Tasmania

Panel member, 2018, Claudio Alcorso Award (international residency), Arts Tasmania

Peer assessor, 2018, Artist Investment Program, Arts Tasmania

Panel member, 2015-2017, 146 ArtSpace section committee, Arts Tasmania

Panel member, 2017, Venice Biennale Team Leader section committee, Arts Tasmania and Australia Council for the Arts

Peer Advisor, 2015, Register of Peers, Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board

Judge, ongoing since 2007, MyState Student Film Festival, Tasmania

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